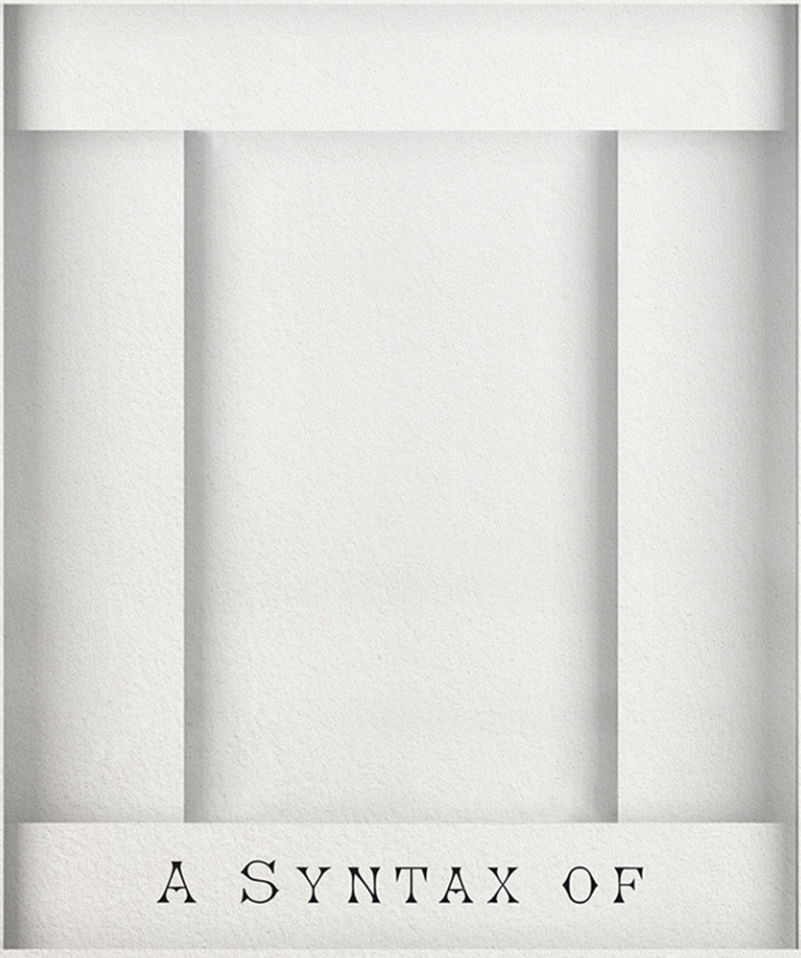
Reductive Reading



A Syntax of Victorian Moralizing

Sarah Allison

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Reductive Reading

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REDUCTIVE READING

A Syntax of Victorian Moralizing

SARAH ALLISON

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Reductive Reading

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On Choosing a Proxy for Style

Reductive Reading versus Close, Too-Close, Distant, Symptomatic, and On-the-Surface Reading

This book is a call for critics to be more explicit about how the evidence we use connects with the arguments we make. It is a study of style and moralizing in Victorian literature and criticism, written by someone trained in the digital humanities. My approach to style entails reading long Victorian novels in prose and verse, contextualized within nineteenth-century critical responses to texts. This method does not obviously lend itself to digital analysis. However, my argument that we should consider style at the level of the grammatical clause bears clear traces of my work in large-scale literary analysis with the Stanford Literary Lab (hereafter, Literary Lab), "a research collective that applies computational criticism, in all its forms, to the study of literature." The aspect of Literary Lab methodology that shaped my work is not computational but argumentative: the practice of beginning each part of the study with a clear justification for reducing a body of texts to specific features. If *Reductive Reading* seems like a riposte to Franco Moretti's *Distant Reading*, it is certainly an argument for what others take to be that book's most threatening trait: its propensity to approach complex questions about literature by simplifying them into terms a computer can understand.

Large-scale computational analysis demands a self-conscious justification of one's method, selection of texts, and initial theoretical assumptions before the project begins, partly to prepare for the unpredictable number of twists the project will necessarily take.[1] That is, new methods of analysis force us to foreground not only our critical hypothesis but the selection of data that we use to support that hypothesis. This means both being explicit about what we already do and changing the way we think about what we do. I argue for the value of naming simple features whose presence or absence will allow us to answer complex questions: a daringly simplistic, even apparently reductive, approach. Determining those features and even tracing them through texts are painstaking, time-consuming, old-fashioned processes. But there is value in the reductive approach that brings a question down to a simpler form—that ultimately makes space for subtle, contradictory, and various claims about how those features occur and recur.

Creating explicit criteria for reducing texts for the purposes of computational analysis is recognized as a methodological strength within digital humanities. Outside it, the same explicitness contributes to its skeptical reception by those who don't "do" it. Insofar as this book is about what we do when we do criticism, it takes up the self-conscious cultivation of forms of reading. Reading itself has been a central term in debates in the past ten years about the relevance and purpose of literary study. Reading practices might be close, too close, or distant; symptomatic or on the surface; paranoid or reparative. With respect to close, distant, and surface reading, the more effectively a term boils down the critical enterprise into a single hypostasized trait, the more easily it propagates: carefully theorized critical approaches circulate in caricature.[2] One hallmark of the reading debates might ultimately be the way they work to reformulate (that is, to reduce) critical theory into critical protocol.[3]

The forms of reading I have listed are coextensive with their central aims: to get closer to a text (or not), or to diagnose the structures of power it conceals (or not). Reductive reading, by contrast, clears space for reading that is *not* reductive. What follows from reductive reading might be something like complex or nuanced reading—a kind that none of these schools would disavow. When Sharon Marcus "just reads," the obvious itself changes shape, resolving, like a high-quality image, into something more finely detailed than one would have thought possible. The reductive moment in *Between Women* might be, simply, the claim that the book "explores what remains to be seen if we proceed without Oedipus, without castration, without the male traffic in women,

without homophobia and homosexual panic," that it reviews norms and institutions in order to "demonstrate their variability" (21, 22). My argument for reductive reading is also a defense of descriptive—call them "weak"—findings: a very strong opening claim can shelter more nuanced claims than a project that opens with a more textured or qualified polemic. The analysis of style, which takes syntactic patterns as a proxy for moral content, is an example of such reductive reading, and the proof of the value of this methodological intervention rests on the significance of the work for our understandings of Victorian literature, moralizing, and style, itself.

Moralizing Syntax

The larger, impossibly complicated question I offer as an example of reductive reading is how style relates to moralizing in the nineteenth-century novel. This book developed from an interest in the Victorian obsession with ideas in art—not with ideas about art, but with ideas *in* art: how ideas are expressed and propagated by art. In March 1855, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who was then engaged in writing *Aurora Leigh* (1859), the blank verse "autobiography of a poetess—(not me)," wrote a letter to John Kenyon about Charles Dickens's industrial novel *Hard Times* (1854). This letter reveals just how large a place was accorded to ideas, as opposed to form, in her conception of her work: "I rather took fright at 'Hard Times,' as Robert told me from a review (we neither of us had seen the book) that it treated of an opposition of the Real & Ideal—but upon consideration I took breath & courage—because it's *impossible* that Dickens & I could walk precisely the same ground. —If we did, there would be still, 'badger's foot' and 'ourangoutang's'—distinct enough" (*Brownings' Correspondence,* letter 3534). The idea that Dickens scooped her in writing about "an opposition of the Real & Ideal" is surprising because the two writers are so different from one another and because the binary is so vague as to seem almost senseless, and yet the real/ideal binary *is* central (though in distinct ways) to both *Aurora Leigh* and *Hard Times*.[4]

In her letter, Barrett Browning is providing a statement about what makes *Aurora Leigh* like a novel—it contains "characters—talks"—but this comparison also shows the extent to which she considered it philosophy.[5] The major formal properties we usually think about—genre (prose vs. poetry), narrative structure, first- or third-person narrative perspective—all mark *Hard Times* and *Aurora Leigh* as "distinct enough," yet, for Barrett Browning, the difference

is only an afterthought. Barrett Browning's disregard for major formal distinctions suggests that she understands art to be centrally concerned with the ideas it treats.

The nineteenth century was a time of narrative ascendency, when plot came to the fore as a means of structuring texts in prose and verse, and also as a time of serious commitment to the idea that art should teach. The ethics of the novel is usually understood as a relation between the reader and the characters or narrator, while moralizing is seen as the propagation of dogmatic pronouncements by a text. A moralistic style "propagates" instead grammatical patterns for framing critical moral judgment. Grammatical patterns of representing others offer a linguistic framework for making judgments about them, integrating an ethics of syntax into our understanding of the ethics of reading. I focus on linguistic patterns that comment on the story in the process of narrating it.

The notion of a moralizing that operates at the level of style is not quite an oxymoron, but the critical questions associated with the study of stylistics and morality are, as Barrett Browning said of herself and Dickens, "distinct enough." Style evokes the study of language and aesthetics: it is the salt of the narrative, its very atmosphere. Morality evokes, in its close connection with ethics, serious philosophical engagements about the power of literature and of literary theory. While I contribute to the growing body of work on the ethics of reading, my focus on "moralizing" has to do with structures of judging other people, rather than the judgments themselves. This line of inquiry is thus distinct from recent studies of how reading novels may have real-world impact on ethical responses in readers, and, in its focus on patterns of taking distance from fictional characters, it draws most from those philosophically oriented critics who emphasize the limits of fictional sympathy. Moralizing also connotes a narrow judgment associated with Victorianism at its most dogmatic.[6] The moralizing that interests me are modes of judgment enacted not at the level of the plot or scene but at the level of the sentence. This book is about sentences that branch out from the process of narrating a story into deliberative commentary about it.

In the present study, I work with stylistic analysis and New Historical, ethical-philosophical, and formal approaches to literature. The conflicting demands made by these critical modes call to mind a passage in *Middlemarch*, a pastiche of newspaper puffery, describing "men whose minds had from long experience acquired breadth as well as concentration, decision of judgment as well as tolerance, dispassionateness as well as energy—in fact, all those qual-

ities which in the melancholy experience of mankind have been the least disposed to share lodgings" (358). This project draws together distinct critical dispositions in an attempt to account for the intersection of style and morality that seemed obvious to many Victorian reviewers and that is echoed by twentieth-century debates about style and politics. In "What Is Writing?," Sartre defines the prose writer as "a man who makes use of words," a rhetorician who "designates, demonstrates, orders, refuses, interpolates, begs, insults, persuades, insinuates" (34). His argument for engaged writing includes a serious meditation on style as an element of rhetoric. Victorian critics, too, advocate a kind of engaged writing that demands, from the reader, an engaged reading or decoding.

An 1861 anonymous review titled "Novels and Novelists" concludes that "life is not all hollowness, as cynical Thackeray proclaims it, nor all helplessness, as George Eliot insinuates; . . . though it *has* bright elements . . . , it has also a principle of action" (310). The reviewer describes, in terms reminiscent of Sartre's prose writer, how the style of each writer communicates his or her moral commitments—Thackeray "proclaims" hollowness; Eliot "insinuates" helplessness—and, like Sartre, the reviewer demands that novels take sides. This demand reveals the degree to which the ethics of the Victorian novel resides not only in an ethical relationship between reader and character but also in fiction's call to the reader to respond to the text—reflecting something like Adam Zachary Newton's notion of narrative ethics.[7] In his book titled *Narrative Ethics*, Newton draws on Emmanuel Levinas, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Stanley Cavell to argue that the acts of narrating, representing, and interpretation comprise an ethical situation that operates within texts and between the text and the reader. In Newton's reading of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the "burden" of narrative ethics is transferred from Coleridge to the mariner to the wedding guest to the reader in a series of discrete ethical interactions: a "story works because it just does transfer those responsibilities through successive frames. . . . In terms of children's games, one might make the analogy to the initial hander-off in 'Hot Potato,' rather than, say, the message sender in 'Telephone' " (22). Narrative ethics resonates with Sartre's claim about what writing is: "We may conclude that the writer has chosen to reveal the world and particularly to reveal man to other men so that the latter may assume full responsibility for the object which has been thus laid bare" (38). Both ideas emphasize the acts of writing and reading in a way consonant with nineteenth-century discussions about literature.[8] Engaged writing in the Victorian period demands engaged

reading: a distinctly committed quality of attention to the message and to the style of a text.

Branching Sentences

Moralizing is a fundamental element of Victorian fiction, but we know surprisingly little about what it looks like or even where it occurs. This is due in part to the shift away from overt didacticism in the period toward more complex forms of exerting influence through art; moralizing becomes more difficult to see in the later nineteenth century. My method is to pay close attention to patterns that carry across sentences, an approach that draws from narratology and the study of the novel, theories of reading including the ethics of reading and historical reading practices, disciplinary history, and linguistics. With respect to the last, I draw on how certain grammatical constructions commonly work in everyday speech to suggest how they might work in special ways in fiction: in my account of Victorian perspective taking, I work from the level of the clause. Some approach the ethics of reading by asking how reading novels might have real-world impact on readers' ethical responses; my approach is closer to those who emphasize the limits of fictional sympathy and the nonperson status of texts through a conscious focus on the clausal construction of fictional character.[9] By considering judgmental perspectives communicated across long literary works, I ask what relations between people are modeled by texts.

The present inquiry is also part of a renewed critical interest in style in the novel exemplified by D. A. Miller's recent work on Austen and Hitchcock and Garrett Stewart's *Novel Violence*.[10] Both Miller and Stewart focus on the uniqueness of the instance of style: Miller considers "touches" in Hitchcock only perceptible at the level of "too-close reading"—"little particulars that, though demonstrably *meant*, never strike us as deeply meaningful" (*Hidden Hitchcock*, 50)—while Stewart focuses on how style creates meaning through the particularity, even the shape, of words on a page. By contrast, my focus on syntax foregrounds likenesses in grammatical structure that resonate through sentences across a novel. This approach reveals how common grammatical structures can be put to new use in a fictional context. That is, relative clauses, for example, often modify head nouns, but the relative clause structure I discuss also pins discourse to story.

But what is the right *scale* for style? I make my case for using the syntactic

pattern within the sentence as a unit of analysis by way of reference to Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey Pullum's *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*: "Syntax is concerned with the way clauses combine to form sentences. The sentence is the largest unit of syntax, while the word is the smallest. The structure of composite words is also a matter of grammar (of morphology rather than syntax), but the study of the relations between sentences within a larger text or discourse falls outside the domain of grammar" (44). What are the choices that operate at this level of meaning, in the largest grammatical unit for which syntax is a meaningful category of analysis? Syntax is concerned with the way clauses *combine* to form sentences: are they linked by an *and* or a *but*? A *which* or a *thus*? Grammar encodes logical relationships between ideas. In the larger collaborative context of the Literary Lab, my interest in the form of the sentence was part of what pushed the Literary Lab's study of style in the direction of style at the scale of the sentence. Subsequently in that project (as it says in the pamphlet), my interest in the logic of grammar led to a turning point: I suggested that, to tackle multiclause sentences, we study clauses in relation to each other by looking at conjunctions. A team adapted the categories of the *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* to compare different types of sentences. In *Reductive Reading*, I also consider the way such clauses might function in genres besides the novel: how a relative clause, which typically modifies a noun, might bring out the analytic qualities of an essay; or how a speech tag might work like a stage direction, simultaneously giving life to the way a character speaks and underlining the writtenness of that speech. I have chosen specific structures for closer analysis from nineteenth-century commentary about texts—an approach informed by current critical debates about ethical representation in nineteenth-century narratives.[11]

I shift from some basic rules about how grammar works to an analysis of the effect of particular clauses; it is one way to match sentence patterns to their "codes," to borrow a term from Roland Barthes's classification system in *S/Z*, which he designed to capture the interplay of discursive modes. He saw then that future work might deal directly with sentence "armature," the logic structuring sentences:

> What is easy for proverbs (which have a very special syntactical, archaistic form) is much less so for the other codes of discourse, since the sentence-model, the example, the paradigm expressing each of them has not (yet) been isolated. Nevertheless, we can conceive that stylistics, which has hitherto been concerned only

> with departures and expressive phrases—in other words, with verbal individuations, with an author's ideolects—will radically change its object and concern itself essentially with isolating and classifying models (patterns) of sentences, clauses, armatures, deep structures. (100)

My answer to Barthes begins with the fact that English—even or especially literary English—works in known ways. Certain grammatical features have special significance in literary language: tense distinguishes between the commentative and narrated worlds; first-, second- and third-person narration give different signals about the connection between the person "telling" the story, the reader, and the characters in the story. It is possible to consider "models (patterns) of sentences, clauses, armatures" in terms of a narrative grammar. The patterns that I look at defy the rhetorical situation of the novel by incorporating conventions from other genres: argumentative precision; theatrical, externalized observation of character; and the lyric prerogative to suspend narrative time. By taking recourse to the present tense and strategies for representing character speech, I step across the fictional border to draw on conventions for making moral judgments that obtain in genres other than the novel: the essay, epic, and drama. My study of particular patterns in particular authors ties into a larger question about Victorian fiction: how formulas for writing about people might function as formulas for thinking about people.

I work at the level of individual authors, but the idiosyncrasies I focus on are syntactic features of special narrative interest. I restore them to their context first in relation to English grammar, then to the context of fiction, and, finally, to the context of a particular author. If this study begins, like the stylisticians Barthes describes, with the author, its focus on syntax means it would be possible to extend a study of the patterns I trace in these three cases to other novelists or literary contexts. From this perspective, style both locates the author in the text and moves us beyond the author.

In the context of moralizing in nineteenth-century fiction, we often focus on the treatment of real social problems and institutions or on narrative techniques that seem designed to make the reader a more ethical person. Both approaches rely on the Victorian narrator as intermediary, a figure composed of a set of addresses to the reader. Yet in nineteenth-century literary criticism, the division between narrator and author in propria persona was not a given, despite the presence of "narratorial interruptions" within the texts under review. Instead, there was a tacit assumption that the narrator is the author. Modern

criticism has considered these interruptions as the addresses of a psychologized narrating figure or as a model of an insidiously ideological perspective, but the ethics that emerges from a study of clauses are distinct from accounts of narrative discourse that depend on some notion of narratorial presence, even a presence remote as Wayne Booth's implied author. There is precedent in nineteenth- and twentieth-century criticism for understanding the author to be felt most clearly as an effect of style. D. A. Miller formulates an analogous idea in his work on Jane Austen, which puts "the author's refusal to give (her) Style a human face" at the center of his analysis (*Jane Austen*, 67). Miller's argument that Austen's style is about its own insistence on impersonality reads it as a trace of her disappearing act (28).[12] If Miller emphasizes the close connection between style and the author's person, he also calls attention to impersonality as a cultivated stance. Miller's idea of style as a form of depersonalized self-expression helps clarify, for me, why nineteenth-century critics might identify it as being part of the important "influence" that fiction might have, as distinct from a more personalized didacticism associated with the figure of a schoolteacher.

Isobel Armstrong presents Victorian ideas about the moral influence of literature through Coventry Patmore's notion of suggestiveness, an ideal of a poem "which is moral without being didactic" (*Victorian Scrutinies*, 12). The *Westminster Review* argues that "one deep full warm circulation is visible throughout" or, in Armstrong's gloss, that the "morality of a poem is something felt along the heart and felt in the blood" (12). This nineteenth-century metaphor of how morality infuses a text is echoed by Leo Spitzer in his essay "Linguistics and Literary History," in which he argues for the metaphor of poetic creation as a lifeblood "everywhere the same" as a way of understanding how an individual's use of language might infuse language, ideas, plot, composition (18). Both share an ideal of a how the spirit of a text might permeate style itself. I take a reductive approach to this ideal by identifying verbs that feature in a certain pervasive effect of tone. For example, the grammatical shifts to the gnomic present tense that I study in Eliot and Barrett Browning signify as a site of wisdom, and yet, insofar as they read as style, they are meaningfully distinct from an author's persona. There is something Spitzerian in choosing a small part to embody the whole; Berel Lang proposes we approach style through a search for the styleme, the "possibly atomic unity of that vague but inevitable category of style" that, like the unicorn, remains illusory ("Looking for the Styleme," 407, 408). The features I look at here do not pretend to embody style, but only to signal its presence.

A Proxy for Style

I approach the complex and notoriously vague phenomenon of style through a disciplinary loanword from statistics: the proxy. In statistics, the proxy is a variable that's easy to measure that takes the place of a variable (or feature of interest) that's difficult to measure. For example, luminosity (as in the light a city gives off at night) might be a proxy for "standard measures of output" in countries with unreliable systems of measuring production.[13] Because the proxy correlates with the thing you're trying to look at, it can take the place of a variable that's more difficult to measure.[14] To choose a proxy is to clearly delimit an approach for investigating a problem; this delimitation makes proxies oddly honest about all the things they will not tell us.

As the field of stylistics has long known—and as I discovered for myself in the Literary Lab's large-scale study of genre "Quantitative Formalism"—different texts by a single hand look the same by the light of computational analysis. It is possible to determine authorship by looking at the frequent words authors tend to use—that is, to define an author's style by a number that captures her or his habitual difference in language use as defined against other authors.[15] It can be even more revealing to look at words that one author uses much more frequently than other authors.[16] If we think of style as the outcome of a thousand small choices based on unconscious habit, it is not surprising its study has long been associated with statistics. The study of style is often shaped in relation to an authoring figure; style is evidence both of idiosyncrasy and genius, of accident and design.

Rather than focusing on patterns of style visible everywhere, through an author's aggregate works—an author's fingerprint—it is also possible to work from the question of what readers have noticed about an author. In that case, the task becomes finding a measurable and interpretable feature set that might stand in for—and illuminate—the specific notion or "principle" of style we wish to trace in a given project. For example, Marissa Gemma uses modals as a proxy for politeness in James. Drawing on sociolinguistic findings and examples from James's novels, she shows how politeness is constructed and then simply *says* that James's modal verbs (*may*, *might*, *will*, *would*) signal politeness. Modals are, in Gemma's line of reasoning, a traceable feature that signal a polite distance; they constitute a circumlocutive attempt at deference that creates a space of possibility. To look for them is to look, by proxy, for such a space of possibility.

I argue that the careful selection of a proxy can mark a path from the world of maps, graphs, and trees to traditional literary argument because it entails defining up front what element of "style" matters to your research and giving a clear defense of your approach. Because I work at the level of the clause, the "proxies" for style I choose are rooted in the study of an individual author, but they could be traced in the work of others, just as Gemma's modals might be shown to have a connection to the work of, say, Jane Austen.

The "proxies" I use here are clause patterns. Sentences unfold word by word and clause by clause and would seem to resist being aggregated and reduced; yet the patterns that structure sentences themselves offer a birds-eye view of key elements of the text. By naming the parts of the sentence that would be of interest, the work of such microstructures become visible across the scale of the novel. Insofar as the ethics of reading is often approached as a relation between the reader and the characters or narrator and moralizing as the inculcation of specific ideas or values by a text, then what is "inculcated" by these microstructures is a set of specific syntactic templates for critical moral judgment.

The patterns I consider are not drawn from the parts of the text that directly offer moral judgments but from those parts that model the process of making such judgments. The proxies for moral style are clauses that seem to branch out from the storytelling process—they embellish, complicate, or resituate the narrative without fully breaking off into an aside—and offer an account of such extended discursive observations, or branching sentences.

Taking Perspective on Character

Embedded clauses like those I study have an ethical dynamic of their own yet cannot be resolved into the action of the plot or into a personalized narrator. Pulling such clauses together according to their structure reveals the plurality of purposes to which such structures can be put. Each judgmental stance implies conflicting possibilities for taking perspective: sympathy and mistrust, faith and skepticism. To incorporate new modes of judgment into the novel, each of the authors in my study reaches for the microstructures of another genre. I consider what is "essayistic" about a relative clause, "theatrical" about new conventions of representing character speech, and "novelistic" about Barrett Browning's modern epic in order to make visible recurrent textual patterns that refigure the relationship between reader and text. This stylistic approach

to Victorian ideology reintegrates the cultural questions prevalent in the period with the study of its innovative forms.

This volume opens with a chapter directly addressed to readers interested in the digital humanities but skeptical about whether these methods are sensitive enough to shed light on contemporary literary-critical questions. Rather than launching a full defense of digital work, I connect its "reductive" move to the familiar argumentative strategy of boiling down other people's ideas in order to develop one's own. There is, I argue, value in a candid acknowledgment of how a text is being simplified. By bridging digital humanities and traditional literary scholarship, the first chapter forms a nontechnical primer in parsing digital scholarship by teaching readers to recognize the argumentative structure that is reflected in the way the parameters of digital humanities projects are set. In this chapter, I argue that reductive reading resonates with the polemical strategies of caricature that characterize the critical manifesto. I consider the role of reductiveness in reading manifestos (reparative reading and surface reading) and in "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," George Eliot's scathing anonymous review written just before she herself turned novelist. Let me note in passing that my book about style and moralizing has also turned out to be a book about George Eliot. She played an outsize role in her time and has continued to do so in ours in discussions about the ethical influence of literature, and she appears in three distinct aspects here: as reviewer (in chapter one), reviewed (in chapter 2), and novelist (in chapter 3).[17]

My second chapter turns to a periodical less known for progressive politics and sophisticated criticism than the *Westminster Review* in which Eliot's essay appeared to take a closer look at a self-consciously moralized approach to style. I read an omnibus essay on novels and novelists in the *London Quarterly Review*, a Methodist organ exemplary in taking the "usual" form of a midcentury review, which reads major fiction of its day in a "xtian spirit," a moral hermeneutic that decodes—literally, restructures and rephrases—the novels it examines. To combat the "pernicious" effects of Eliot's "excusing" sympathy in *Adam Bede* and *Mill on the Floss* and Thackeray's unrelenting cynicism in *Vanity Fair*, it rearranges them at the level of style. The critical discussions in this chapter are drawn from the years before criticism began to take itself more seriously and to professionalize in the mid- to late 1850s. In these discussions, the dominant questions are not whether novels should teach but what they should teach and how. The reviews argue passionately for the moral effects of art by highlighting the too-often "unsuspected character" of falsehood in art. I propose a reductive

approach to understanding a moralism that works through style; this criticism counters the challenge of a morally laden "suggestiveness" with explicitness, pairing long extracts with summary and paraphrase that spell it out.

In chapter 3, the first case study, I bring the theoretical concerns raised by chapter 1 to bear on the critical culture I sketch out in chapter 2. This first reductive reading—which is also a very, very close reading—is of *Middlemarch*, a novel that exhorts its readers to develop an intelligent sympathy toward others. I argue that its depiction of the gravest threat to this ideal—the difficulty of perceiving other people—is embedded in the narrative syntax itself. I trace a peculiar grammatical pattern through *Middlemarch*: clauses that shift from a narrating past to a universalizing present by means of the relative pronoun *which*. This pattern is present in the first sentence of the novel: "Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress." These clauses integrate reflection into the story's presentation. Instead of promoting specific values, they inscribe a process of making judgments into the act of perception and aim to educate the reader in how to take perspective on other people. Commentative clauses have little to do with the "all-knowing, all-understanding, and all-forgiving" mother figure invoked by D. A. Miller in his description of Eliot's narrative voice. Rather, they reveal a pattern of sharp conceptual discrimination in *Middlemarch* that is at odds with the larger movement toward sympathy that critics have long understood to shape its plot. The fictional world of that novel is ultimately renounced in favor of return to a satirical essay form that requires no sympathy for the protagonists.

Chapter 4 reads what Virginia Woolf called "declamations" in Barrett Browning's long blank verse poem *Aurora Leigh*. In a way, the explicit pronouncements about the ethical and political power of art in that verse novel have more in common with Martha Nussbaum's *Poetic Justice* (1995) than Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854). By embedding such pronouncements in a narrative of the heroine's moral and intellectual development, the text draws on the lyric prerogative to suspend narrative time. Barrett Browning incorporates the formal signals of epic and lyric poetry (like exclamations, rhetorical questions and rushing meter) into her novel-epic in order to present an alternative rhetorical stance to the time of narrative story or discourse—a poetic present outside the novel's fictional frame. In the narrative of personal enlightenment and poetic development, the heroine's mistakes lead to compromise and growth; at the level of the line, the poet's mistakes are part of a lifelong vocation to engage with reality as it unfolds. This chapter, like the one that precedes it, looks

at how the present tense signifies literarily and explores its associations with sage discourse.[18] From the female sage, I move to a male storyteller and from a stance that models perspectival distance on the story to one most famous for evoking a sense of immediacy. Ivan Kreilkamp argues that Dickens responds to print culture by figuring the author as a storyteller, invoking live performance and physical presence. For Amanda Anderson, Dickens is both troubled by and aware of the importance of perspectival distance and critical detachment. In my chapter on Charles Dickens, I explore the problem of mediation—textual and moral—through the effect of "theatrical" expanded reporting clauses that describe how characters speak, at the level of dialogue exchange.

My final chapter takes up character speech in Dickens as a way to consider the nuts and bolts of representing fictional people through dialogue. I link the notoriously elbow-nudging obviousness of his depiction of character with the system of values associated with them. If sincerity is, as Lionel Trilling has it, the "congruence between avowal and actual feeling," then character manner is the site where the gap between avowal and actual feeling can be observed and recorded. Scenes of dialogue reveal the mechanisms by which candor is constructed. The characters of Dickens—flat in E. M. Forster's dichotomy, beloved by his contemporaries—are known for being comic, underdeveloped, and alive. I look at how their legibility relies on a system of emphatic hints, the "meaning smile" or glance "that could not be mistaken." How does the interplay of character speech and manner negotiate the problem of thoughtfulness that besets Dickens's characters, good and bad? The representation of character speech (in Dickens) and commentary (in Eliot) seem to be the extremes of "showing" and "telling." Each judgmental stance implies conflicting possibilities for a perspective of sympathy and mistrust, faith and skepticism.

I conclude by connecting the discussion of the representation of character in Dickens with the idea of a grammar of narrative perspective from the preceding chapters and recent work on ethics and style. Much of the contemporary criticism around the ethical work novels do considers reading as a relation between the reader and either the characters or narrator. By contrast, I propose in the conclusion an ethics of syntax that works at the level of the clause, revisiting key theoretical accounts of characters and narrators. The book opens by affirming a mode of self-conscious critical modesty, whereby one acknowledges one's own reductive methods, with the case for the power and utility of strategic reductionism; it concludes by turning back to the larger questions it has approached through a simplified hermeneutic.

CHAPTER 1

In Defense of Reading Reductively

> "Not to put too fine a point upon it," a favourite apology for plain speaking with Mr. Snagsby, which he always offers with a sort of argumentative frankness.
>
> CHARLES DICKENS, *BLEAK HOUSE*, 1852–53

There is a strain in reading from two very different perspectives at once: the simplified and explicit hermeneutic beaten into my head in my work with the Stanford Literary Lab and the complex and open interpretive modes that characterize the more traditional literary criticism this book practices. Critics who bring a reductive perspective to traditional criticism must echo Mr. Snagsby's "argumentative frankness" while retaining a commitment to the values of nuance, inconsistency, and paradox that underwrite the culture of theory and traditional literary criticism.

The book as a whole, that is, makes the case that reduction is valuable rhetorically and argumentatively. In this chapter, I take up Amanda Anderson's challenge in *The Way We Argue Now* to consider the characterological implications of the critical attitude I endorse and the way it posits simplicity and stupidity in opposition to nuance and intelligence. First, I consider the need for candor and explicitness in delineating the assumptions that underlie our arguments and in addressing the limits of those arguments, an important part of my own acculturation to reductive reading in the context of the Stanford Literary Lab and its predecessor, the Beyond Search Digital Humanities

Workshop. The second part turns to the social context of reduction, our own maxim against the use of maxims that dictates against too-stark polemic—against being "mean." Just as Victorian literature was meant to be moral without moralizing, our own critical culture values sharply formulated agonistic claims at the same time that it privileges tactful, qualified engagement with the work of others. One must be careful, but one must be clear; one must be forceful, but one must be subtle. The binary of complicated / simple slips easily into an interpersonal attitude of attention / reduction. How do we negotiate reductionism in a context that is, at best, ambivalent about polemic? Polemic, as we might imagine it in Sartrean terms, based on an ideal of forceful and unambiguous communication, has come down to us as an aesthetic of clarity that characterizes instrumental reason.[1] I look at the benefits of being "mean" in the critical manifesto, of taking an avowedly hostile perspective that gives a critic license to beg questions and to ignore important complications. As we argue now, announcing one's simplifying moves—or characterizing one's own moves as simplistic—is not smart. Exhausted critical schools read reductively. Censors read reductively. So why do it?

'Tis a Gift to Be Simple

Digital humanities work has demonstrated that daringly simple—even reductive—project design can yield startlingly fresh perspectives on complex literary problems. The greatest gift to traditional literary criticism from the digital analysis of texts, I argue here, is not digital at all. Rather, the gift of computational analysis is its emphasis on developing projects that foreground the questions up front—and that offer a clear statement of how we propose to look for the answers. "Reductive reading" is my term for critical methods that call attention to how they reduce a text by emphasizing specific kinds of evidence. The term calls attention to the process of subordinating textual complexity to the point one wants to make about it.

The contribution of the kind of large-scale project I have done with the Stanford Literary Laboratory rests on how we justify simplifying a text to traits basic enough for a computer to discern. Researchers must choose how to reduce texts in order to see many of them at once and must therefore begin with an explicit statement about what will count as evidence, and why. The legitimacy of the enterprise rests on convincing other experts that we have made reasonable compromises. But the critical commonplace that large-scale digital

textual study is reductive suggests that other experts are not always convinced. In a more general critical context, however, such study is not set apart by its willingness to risk a reductive move but by its willingness to acknowledge that move.

Digital humanities work often makes the starting point of a given project humblingly explicit. One benefit of a system that rewards a carefully formulated proposal (an overt rationale for how you reduce a text in order to illuminate specific problems) is that the final payoff of the research is closely keyed to its grounding assumptions and questions. When we base our criticism on "readings" of texts, we often wind up somewhere quite different from where we began. Under those circumstances, I have rewritten the introduction; as long as the book is finished by the deadline, it is all right if the focus changes. But if you've built a database, an interface, an algorithm, "rewriting the introduction" in a way that materially affects the evidence you are using can undo months of work, as well as the record of all that doing it wrong. It is essential to describe the results in terms of your initial assumptions.

Such work tilts the balance of the argument to its beginning. In a monograph, the evidence ideally builds toward a central thesis; the thesis evolves as you develop the connections across your evidence. By contrast, a project that demands both a corpus and a strategy for dealing with it asks that you lay out a clear statement about what you're looking for and (again) about what will count as evidence, and why—especially if the project is funded by a grant. Once the project is under way, all that clarity evolves into a series of lists, data points, and visualizations, and it is devilishly difficult to return to that clarity, to shape those miscellaneous results into something recognizable as an articulated argument. The foregrounded reductiveness of choosing a proxy gives way, at some point in the writing process, to the mystified reductiveness of best practices for convincing other people that you are right.

The first Litlab studies I worked on made two serious scholarly compromises from the outset: to reject the material and editorial context of individual volumes and to work with a corpus of digitized texts we did not create. Our corpus came from a commercial database, the Chadwyck-Healey nineteenth-century fiction collection. Chadwyck-Healey is an example of an archival database that—to follow Jerome McGann's argument—is in the process of preserving our cultural inheritance according to the market-oriented protocols that have shaped and enabled new forms of digital analysis. Acquired by Proquest in 1999, Chadwyck-Healey is described on Wikipedia as "a one-time microfilm

publishing company that was one of the first to produce full-text CD-ROM databases." The database originally was populated, as John Sutherland notes in a 1994 review of it, with the "out-of-copyright editions that PhD students are specifically warned not to use," and the selection of texts—in what Sutherland characterizes as a "Gordian knot" approach —was based on the obsolescent *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (1969–72) ("When in ROM," par. 4). In 1994, a CD-ROM making waves for enabling keyword search of a lot of English poetry was also notorious for its disregard of disciplinary values. Jerome McGann, who was already using digital tools to transform scholarly editing through written arguments and the Rossetti Archive, lamented Chadwyck-Healey's editorial decision to omit all the front and back matter in the English Poetry Database, a decision that "strip[s] the Database of its usefulness for all kinds of the most basic scholarly work." ("Radiant Textuality," 383).[2] Despite the fact that the collection does not partake of the "complex network of trusted information and institutional relations" the way printed works do, preparing them "for further critical and scholarly engagements," it still afforded the Litlab's "Style at the Scale of the Sentence" one material advantage: that "speech was marked with enough clarity and consistency for our tagger to recognize it" (McGann, *A New Republic of Letters,* 287; Allison et al., "Style at the Scale of the Sentence," 3).[3] We did not emphasize the limitations of the corpus but focused instead on what it let us do: its size and searchability made sense for a study based not on how one novel worked but on how a lot of novels worked.

We were after relatively abstract patterns of style, and we used a selection of digital texts that let us study narrative apart from dialogue. This binary was based on a long tradition in narrative theory—from Benveniste's *Essays in General Linguistics* to Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero* and Weinrich's *Tempus* (Allison et al., "Style at the Scale of the Sentence," 19). To open up a question about style in many texts, we needed a big corpus, and we started with a theoretically informed division of material based on the formal properties of texts, independent of historical and biographical context.[4] Rather than grounding the inquiry in historical and biographical context, we sought to make sense of the findings and then went back to connect our findings with that context.

A complementary reductive project to ours—one that ignored the texts themselves in favor of comprehensive bibliography—is Natalie Houston's NEH project "The Field of Victorian Poetry, 1840–1900," which reconfigures bibliographic information as a database rather than a list in order to make it

available for network analysis. Houston's contribution is not just to have reconfigured metadata into a newly manipulable form but to have redefined the concept of the book to include the information signaled by its title page: "I use network analysis to examine books as physical objects that both constitute and represent relationships" ("Toward a Computational Analysis," 502). Houston shares Leah Price's interest in books as material objects, but while Price theorizes that materiality, Houston attends to the connections among the people that produced them (500–504).[5] In her efforts to capture a literary field, Houston includes "editions of the works of earlier poets" as well as new books (503). This was undoubtedly a pain in the ass, yet for those of us hoping to use Houston's results in the light of recent work on the relevance of belated and "slow print," it is very helpful.[6] Her project makes use of a traditional scholarly form of reductive reading (cataloguing) in order to describe, in extremely clear terms, what "counts" as a literary field. This does not simply lay the foundation of future research: it is itself a critical intervention, and the result is a model of the poetic field previously unthinkable. Is it reductive? Of course.

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Excel

I joined the Beyond Search Workshop at Stanford after attending a presentation about using topic modeling to index periodicals, which spoke to my interest in its application to the material history of texts and periodical critical culture (the latter is the focus of the next chapter). In the workshop, the complicated algorithms Matt Jockers was already developing seemed remote from my research interests: as a Victorianist trained in the novel and narrative poetics, I was interested in patterns of moralizing that—I argued—might be perceived at the level of the sentence rather than the plot or character.

Curious about the way George Eliot, who objected to simplistic moral doxa in literature and who wrote in her essays about the moral power of art, got her teaching done, I began with a review of narratological perspectives. Dorrit Cohn describes the rise and fall of direct narratorial address in nineteenth-century British realism as a silencing of the narrator due to shifting aesthetic priorities: "With the growing interest in the problems of individual psychology, the audible narrator disappears from the fictional world. . . . [A] fully developed figural consciousness siphons away the emotional and intellectual energy formerly lodged in the expansive narrator" (*Transparent Minds*, 25). Eliot's novels echo this larger pattern; David Carroll says Eliot wanted to write wisdom literature

but only had the novel. To some degree, as critics have noticed, the analytical habit of narrating goes underground. In Susan S. Lanser's account, Eliot turns from observations contextualized by "perspectival contingency" in the early novels (prefatory comments like "I believe" or "I have heard") to "brief embeddings within seemingly narrative paragraphs. . . . Maxims that in earlier novels would surely have been qualified in some way are simply presented as if they were true; now narrative comments are rarely contextualized" (*Fictions of Authority*, 93–96). Here, Lanser argues, Eliot gives up explicitly contingent positionality for insidious assertions of absolute authority. For Lanser, Eliot's maxim against maxims "mediates the tension in her work between a semantics of indeterminacy and a syntax of authority" (99). In the Beyond Search Workshop, someone asked me, in seriousness, how I would define a syntax of authority in traceable terms.

What I had found by reading carefully was that the present-tense commentary about the story was often woven into the past-tense narrative. That is, the distinction between story and discourse was much less sharply delineated than I would have anticipated. So I defined the syntax of authority as the presence of narratorial observation. That is, I approached a larger question about the language of certainty through the occurrence of present-tense generalizations that seemed to signal the appearance of a wise narrator. My work on relative clauses in George Eliot challenges the sharp narratological distinction between present-tense moral commentary and past-tense narration by looking at hybrid sentences that include both tenses. To get a sense of the larger patterns, we began by using a Stanford-developed speech tagger to transform *Middlemarch*, sentence by sentence, from this:

> Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress.

to this:

> Miss (NNP) Brooke (NNP) had (VBD) that (DT) kind (NN) of (IN) beauty (NN) which (WDT) seems (VBZ) to (TO) be (VB) thrown (VBN) into (IN) relief (NN) by (IN) poor (JJ) dress (NN). (.)
> NNP NNP VBD DT NN IN NN WDT VBZ TO VB VBN IN NN IN JJ NN.

to this:

> (^[^\"]*VBD[^\"]*VBZ[^\"]*$)|(^[^\"]*VBZ[^\"]*VBD[^\"]*$)

Jockers built an interface for me and enabled regular expression searching of a copy of *Middlemarch* parsed into parts of speech. The final example above is a

regular expression for isolating sentences that use both past and present tenses. The problem was that our tagger, built to read contemporary prose, wasn't up to Eliot's complex sentence structure. Harry Tily, a graduate student in the linguistics department at the time, suggested that a third of all sentences from *Middlemarch* would make a good sample size, and I should just go through it by hand. I started with my first Excel sheet of *Middlemarch*, which listed every third sentence in the novel.

The Excel document I looked at was very different from the novel proper, yet it made it possible for me to tag and sort sentences manually. I could then zero in on particularly suggestive patterns, and I chose one in particular: a relative clause that changes from narrative declaration to a present-tense generalization about a character trait, midsentence. The manipulation of the text with Excel allowed me to think about *Middlemarch* at the local level, from a fresh perspective. This form of textual estrangement reveals that story and discourse are inextricable in *Middlemarch*: in it, 40 percent of all sentences that use present tense at all also use past tenses—that is, sentences that graft commentary onto narrative occur far more often than criticism has previously suggested. Examining the novel in a new medium—the manipulable Excel spreadsheet—changes what we know about the text. It also produces a new object of analysis: a body of sentences that look like they go together and yet are all very different. That's what happens if you collect a whole lot of sentences linked by structural features.

When I reviewed this set of hybrid sentences together, an odd pattern jumped out, which I came to call the commentative clause. This clause is a subordinate clause that shifts a sentence from the narrative past to the commentative present by means of a relative pronoun. It appears in the very first sentence of *Middlemarch*: "Miss Brooke *had* that kind of beauty *which seems* to be thrown into relief by poor dress (7, my emphasis). Dorothea is first described as a figure, an object of aesthetic contemplation rather than of specifically human interest. As the first paragraph goes on to reveal, Dorothea is not so much a Mary of the manger as a Madonna of Italian art—not the narrative character Mary but her representation. Dorothea's beauty is given moral weight through its abstraction: the character is immediately connected to a larger symbolic structure. This sentence says not only that Miss Brooke is beautiful but that she is good; her beauty is most visible through a *relation* to simple dress. The basic moral figure of the novel—Dorothea's virtue thrown into relief by the prosaic world of *Middlemarch*—illustrates this single, morally

telling quality. The seemingly simplistic "tagging" or hand-coding of sentences in *Middlemarch* for tense produced a broader picture of how past and present tenses are interwoven at the level of the sentence.

The value of this structural analysis might be clearer in comparison to the analysis of thematically linked sentences that a more traditional reading might produce. We might, for example, find an odd complement to the argument about Eliot's disappearing moralizing in *The Mill on the Floss*, when Lucy Deane says to her cousin, the heroine Maggie Tulliver, "I can't think what witchery it is in you, Maggie, that makes you look best in shabby clothes" (372). Lucy speaks with the confidence of a narrator and as the unwitting exemplar of dramatic irony. The idea of beauty "thrown into relief by poor dress" is implicit here, but Maggie's singularity is unique to her (the witchery *in you*) and ascribed to her by another character rather than the narrator. Elsewhere in the novel Maggie's beauty is valorized as expressing simplicity of character, but Lucy's comment here is darkly suggestive of how her own lover will fall in love with Maggie. The *Middlemarch* narrator's generalized observation that such a beauty exists leaves its possessor innocent, but when Lucy suggests that there is some "witchery" in Maggie, she invokes a dark art as well as given trait. Since the quality of Maggie's beauty is unique to her, she is culpable for its effects—which does not seem quite fair. The moral connotations of this comment permeate the conceptual structure of the novel, pushing it in conflicting directions; the framing of Maggie's beauty as bewitching contributes the confusion of culpability and responsibility that will be so central to her relationship with Stephen Guest, whereas Dorothea's beauty is posed as an implicitly good property isolated from more specific fictional applications.[7] The first sentence of *Middlemarch* invokes a mode of mimesis that depends on an abstract conceptual framework to achieve narrative effects, or so I argue. There are, however, drawbacks to reading "the syntax of authority" through a survey of its occurrences: what you get in every third sentence of *Middlemarch* is a list of entries that can be tagged and sorted by structural similarities but have been stripped of the narrative context that gives them meaning in the novel. This list reveals larger patterns (like the presence of past-present hybrids) as well as the kind of subtle patterns one might very well pick up on by reading, but it also reveals an impossibly varied collection of samples, which lends itself more easily to descriptive taxonomy than coherent polemic.[8] The examples also bear different relations to what one might consider a "syntax of authority" or, rather, imply different kinds of authority in different places. The final challenge of

this project was figuring out how to reintegrate the miscellaneous body of sentences I collected into discussions about sympathy, realism, and narrative in George Eliot.

A spreadsheet of thousands of sentences from *Middlemarch* ultimately brought me back to the first one. The method of this book is, in each case, to begin by sorting out the tangle of two centuries of critical reception in order to choose a proxy that will shed light on a persistent critical concern raised by the author's work (like the omniscient present-tense narration in *Middlemarch*). In circumscribing the evidence, I also develop my case for a radical simplification of my investigation of style. Because I proceed at the level of syntactic abstraction, I end up with a set of sentences that have structural similarities but often very different content and moral resonance; the argument can, in consequence, house somewhat more heterogeneous examples than would have been generated if my principle of selection had been something like, say, my own intuitive sense of a syntax of authority. But what else is it to throw "fresh light" on an old problem than to see how some of our more familiar passages wake up in strange company?

Reductive or Candid?

In a review of Franco Moretti's *Distant Reading* and the Litlab pamphlet *Between Canon and Corpus*, Jonathan Freedman argues that digital humanities work needs "the intuitions, the critical reflexes, the sharp attention that can only come with reading, reading, and more reading—and attention to the meaning-making capacities of the texts we read—to guide us to what is important in composing our field of data, and then to help us make sense of it once we find it" ("After Close Reading"). The ratio of before and after in Freedman's sentence itself reflects the importance of careful project design that I'm arguing for here. But I'd like to note something else about Freedman's defense of "techniques of intrinsic analysis of literary texts": that he writes from the perspective of "those of us who are willfully or characterologically immune to the charms of statistics, data-crunching and chart drawing." This is a debate about culture as much as it is a debate about method.

My focus on reductiveness is partly an investigation of the characterological implications of digital humanities methodology, and I want to pause here on Amanda Anderson's observation in *The Way We Argue Now* that "appeals to character" have an odd relation to argument: it is never fully clear if they are

incidental attacks or if they provide the pin that, when pulled, will bring the whole argumentative structure down (134).[9] Anderson argues that we should pay more attention to the characterological element of theory, and I agree, as it has been an important part in figuring the clash between close and distant reading, between threatened humanities and privileged STEM fields. The "reductiveness" of computational analysis is perceived to stain the hands of those who do such work. Bethany Nowviskie has argued that the classic characterological caricature in the digital humanities of hack vs. yack (roughly, a can-do programmer vs. a computationally incompetent blowhard) now largely circulates as "short-hand for a supposedly un-critical, anti-theoretical, presentist, cheerleading, neoliberal digital humanities culture, standing in active opposition to . . . whatever the speaker or writer understands as salutary humanities *yack*."[10]

Anderson argues that characterizations—"pragmatists called smug, or rationalists depicted as defensive and uptight," "the hermeneut of suspicion" represented as "paranoid," "the p.c. brigade" made out to be "oppressively pious"—appear not only "at moments of negative judgment" but also when critics "flesh out their accounts through appeal to characterological enactment" (134). She gives the example of Rorty's ironist and metaphysician:

> Metaphysicians have a need for clear categories, boundaries, and grids, through which they filter all the influences with which they come into contact. The ironist favors the thick description characteristic of ethnography and literary criticism and is endlessly seeking to enlarge his circle of acquaintance and his powers of redescription. The metaphysician uses abstract and thin terms and seeks to stabilize his conceptions. (129)

This has clear resonance—political implications included—with the self-caricature that circulates in digital humanities discussions. How do we think about character in digital humanities work? What argument would reductive reading make on its own behalf? I would connect it, here, to a topic Anderson takes up at length—the importance of an ideal of sincerity (understood as a continual aspiration to universality) as critical integrity, which is close to the values of transparency, explicitness, and even candor that are central to an idealized digital humanities ethos that is about hacking well. Steven Ramsay, known in some digital humanities circles for saying you have to be able to code yourself, describes the humanism of digital work like this: "Software cannot be neutral, . . . since there is no level at which assumption disappears. It must

rather, assert its utter lack of neutrality with candor, so that the demonstrably non-neutral act of interpretation can occur" ("In Praise of Pattern," 182). For Ramsay, computationally facilitated studies are candid about their biases and prejudgments. That is: digital work doesn't claim to be fair, only to be open about its own partiality.

That is, if the criticism that computational analysis is reductive is a pretty frequent refrain, it's also implicit in a common defense of computational analysis, which prides itself on being explicit. The first recommendation of best practice that coauthors computer scientist D. Sculley and literature scholar Bradley M. Pasanek make about working together is to "make all of [one's] underlying assumptions about the text and its representations explicit" ("Meaning and Mining," 422). As Natalie Houston argues in "Toward a Computational Analysis of Victorian Poetics," "one of the clarifying effects of working computationally is the need to define all of one's terms and procedures as specifically as possible so that they can be translated into the logical structures of a code. . . . Readers and literary critics already make these decisions, more or (usually) less explicitly" (508).[11] Houston tracks the "graphic codes" in poetry that we register unconsciously—like the white space around the words—and that we are thus individually ill equipped to track across texts. A centrally innovative and creative move of Houston's work is her focused attention on the negative space that visually characterizes poetry, which is an obvious, and interesting, marker of distinctly poetic form.

The emphasis on explicitness and consistency means that as things go inevitably wrong or as the results turn out to be uninteresting or difficult to interpret, it's possible to return to the stated rationale: the reason anyone thought the project would be a good idea. Franco Moretti came to call such up-front theoretical work "operationalizing"—redefining concepts in terms that we and the programs could work with.[12] Operationalizing captures the abstraction that's at stake with the "little pact with the devil" that one makes at the inception of distant reading (*Distant Reading*, 48).[13] Moretti argues for the sacrifice of "reading" for "knowledge." I emphasize the more obviously negative term "reductive."

To call this kind of reading "reductive" is to foreground not only the critical process of reducing a text but also our critical aversion to that process. My argument suggests that we confront that aversion, that we acknowledge the tendency of our critical arguments to engage in polemic, and that we then acknowledge the reductiveness of this move as a component of critical cul-

ture that we need not eradicate. I want to change the dominant conceptual dichotomy from human versus machine, or even example versus abstraction, to simple versus complex. But simple and reductive are not the same.

Critical theory is intelligent where it is complex and powerful where it is simple; reducing someone's argument helps move you from one to the other. Whatever we are doing with texts as literary critics, we are usually trying *not* to reduce them. For a literary critic to reduce textual complexity is, as one skeptical sociologist colleague put it, bad for business. Worse, reductiveness characterizes the kind of instrumentalist thinking that theory and criticism have long sought to challenge. A reductive approach seems opposed to what is most valuable about literary criticism. And yet (of course) we inevitably do reduce textual complexity: all arguments about texts are reductive insofar as they focus on certain elements at the expense of others. The art of polemic does not call attention to how much of the problem one is ignoring. As critics, we do, indeed, write polemics. Beyond acknowledging one's situatedness, critical investment, and argumentative focus, it does not pay to be too frank about the ways in which one's view of a text is partial and biased.

Reductionism is the evil twin of simplicity. To make the case for it as a critical mode, as I am doing here, runs against a disciplinary imperative to display careful attention to discursive context and subtle textual variance. I now consider how reductiveness works in a few key critical polemics, notable for their rhetorical subtlety and also for their ability to work in a reductive mode. My theoretical intervention is to connect "reductive" digital approaches with theoretical polemic that is reductive—even "mean"—in modern and nineteenth-century critical manifestos.

The negative version of reductionism haunts digital work at its most candid: Michael Witmore recently acknowledged in a study of the Folger digital texts of Shakespeare's plays that the "distances in [this plot] are a caricature of the linguistic complexity of these plays. We have strategically reduced that complexity in order to simplify a set of comparisons" ("'Finding 'Distances' between Shakespeare's Plays"). Strategic reduction makes it possible to see "all" the plays at once, but what one is seeing is a caricature. To come up with a way to compare the plays means exaggerating a single trait to monstrous proportions. Caricature, like satire, is creative. Reading reductively is the thesis stage—before antithesis or synthesis—a moment of transforming a tangled problem into a point from which it is possible to begin.

Reductionism circulates as a term of art (for example, in Jung's reading of

Freud or Latour's "irreductionism"), but I am thinking about the polemical effects that arise when critics frankly acknowledge their own reductive moves. Producing a thumbnail sketch of her own field to demonstrate what might be learned from Silvan Tomkins, Eve Sedgwick writes, "At the risk of being awfully reductive, I suggest that this anticipatory, mimetic mechanism may also shed light on a striking feature of recent feminist and queer uses of psychoanalysis" (*Touching Feeling*, 132). Or take Geoffrey Baker, who argues in the context of the debate that structures his discussion of literature and engagement since Nietzsche and the naturalists that "the dichotomy encapsulated by the terms clarity and confusion might appear overly simplistic and brutally reductive. Indeed, it is. Yet this is how it emerged, and this is how it is expressed and troubled by later figures. As I shall demonstrate, it is partly through these brutal reductions that Zola and Nietzsche articulate their own aesthetics and shore up their own positions" (*Clarity and Confusion*, 4). Baker will ultimately show how the dichotomy is "troubled" and challenged by the work of its most influential proponents, but he opens with an argument about the power of "brutal reduction" in shaping a debate for over a century and how it makes it possible to trace the changing aesthetic and political assumptions associated with those terms.

Theory Strong and Weak: Sedgwick's Case for Reductive Reading

The reductive moment in theoretical argument is sometimes clearest—and most self-reflective—when the writer chooses not to fight fair. If there are argumentative advantages in summarizing one's opponent's case fairly and distinctly, there are also advantages in summarizing unfairly and untactfully: reducing the complexity of other people's arguments has obvious polemical value. This is especially true in texts that have an air of manifesto about them. Here, I discuss "Surface Reading: An Introduction" (2009) by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, and two of the essays it cites: Bruno Latour's "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern" (2004) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You" (2003). Collecting these three essays under the heading of "manifestos" is somewhat reductive; zeroing in on a "reductive" and, in the latter two cases, mean moment in each is more so. Yet being mean can offer a peculiarly honest way of engaging with someone else's argument. Rather than presenting a nuanced version of a particular claim

or even creating a straw man by working from an ostensibly fair but actually oversimplified version of that claim, being mean makes it clear that you are distorting someone else's argument in order to make a point. Acknowledging a moment of meanness affirms the very norm of generosity it violates.

Best and Marcus begin and end their introduction with a careful, generous discussion of Jameson; the essays in the special issue "The Way We Read Now" grew out of a 2006 American Comparative Literature Association seminar on the twenty-fifth anniversary of *The Political Unconscious* (1981). Their careful history of symptomatic reading ends, however, with a paragraph on Jameson that begins "Fredric Jameson argues that only weak, descriptive, empirical, ideologically complicit readers attend to the surface of a text" ("Surface Reading," 5).[14] This sentence lays out key adjectives that are recuperated by the essays in the special issue and in texts referenced by Best and Marcus in the introduction. In order to assert that their special issue "should not be construed as a unitary mode or a pilgrimage to a single point, but as a road branching in multiple directions," it seems they need a simplified version of Jameson—not a point where the road ends, but a point from which the road begins, a formulation that will make visible the "significant overlap among our contributors" (3). This special collection marks a turn in a generational reading practice, and Best and Marcus conclude with Latour's way out of "the impasses created by what has become an excessive emphasis on ideological demystification," which turns out to restore the shared project of "the desire for a more complete view of reality" in both symptomatic and surface reading (18, 19).

In his 2004 essay "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?," Latour draws a clearer distinction between frankness and meanness, taking refuge in the latter in order to parody reductive thinking. He calls for a criticism "associated with *more*, not with *less*, with *multiplication*, not *subtraction,*" but, in a key moment illustrates the dangers of reducing Bourdieu's argument to caricature at the same time that he demonstrates its polemical benefit for his own argument (248).

> Let me be mean for a second. What's the real difference between conspiracists and a popularized, that is a teachable version of social critique inspired by a too quick reading of, let's say, a sociologist as eminent as Pierre Bourdieu . . .? In both cases, you have to learn to become suspicious of everything people say because of course we all know that they live in the thralls of a complete *illusio* of their real motives. Then, after disbelief has struck and an explanation is requested for what is really

> going on, in both cases again it is the same appeal to powerful agents hidden in the dark acting always consistently, continuously, relentlessly. (228–29)

The "opponent" here isn't exactly Bourdieu, but a traduced version of his ideas that has—in Latour's nightmare sketch of contemporary intellectual discourse—replaced him. But this passage is the more convincing because it announces a shift in tone to something less generous, less fair. The irony here is that Latour's claim that he and, by implication, the reader, are going to "be mean for a second" is, in fact, a powerfully reductive move. The reader, having implicitly countenanced that move, is likely to feel implicated by it, either as its target or as a sympathetic listener—or both. Latour announces that he is about to quit playing fair *in order to* describe what he takes to be a misrepresentation of Bourdieu's ideas. The fact that this move occurs on the fourth page out of twenty-four demonstrates the relevance of reductive reading to everyday polemic: what happens is that a caricatured opposite prompts a more subtle alternative analysis. The moment of misreading as collision or antagonism is, famously in Harold Bloom, a creative, productive process. Paul de Man's 1974 review of the *Anxiety of Influence* (1973) argues that Bloom comes closest to the truth about language when he's describing, in rhetorical figures, the possible forms of misprision (*Blindness and Insight,* 267–76). Misreading—partial or biased reading—is reductive and also generative. In the next section, however, I want to dwell on the kind of misreading that oversimplifies not in order to engage in agonistic critical practice but to make room for newly subtle observations.

Sedgwick appears twice in the surface reading essay by Best and Marcus—first as one of the great symptomatic readers in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) and then as the originator of "reparative reading" in *Touching Feeling*, a search for an alternative affective relation to the objects of criticism. In *Touching Feeling* the binary between simplistic strong theory and complex weak theory is not actually a binary: in Sedgwick's reading of D. A. Miller's *Novel and the Police* (1988) one shelters the other. Heather Love finds it impossible "to read Sedgwick's essay on paranoid and reparative reading as *only* a call for reparative reading," both because Sedgwick acknowledges the strengths of paranoid reading as well as moments of strong theory in her own chapter and because there are "moments of pique in the essay that do not sound a reparative note" ("Truth and Consequences," 238, 237–38). For Love, one of Sedgwick's crucial contributions is her recognition that "thinking is impossible" without the "aggression

at the heart of psychic life" (238).[15] One passage Love doesn't mention but that has stayed with me is Sedgwick's comment on D. A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police*: "Everything can be understood as an aspect of the carceral, therefore the carceral is everywhere. But who reads *The Novel and the Police* to find out whether its main argument is true?" (*Touching Feeling*, 135). This comment is an example of reductive reading (Miller's book as tautology) that leads to a theorization of reductive reading itself. That is, at the very moment when she reduces Miller's book to a caricature of itself, Sedgwick argues that the "very breadth of reach that makes the theory so strong offers the space . . . for a wealth of tonal nuance, attitude, worldly observation, performative paradox, aggression, tenderness, wit, inventive reading, *obiter dicta*, and writerly panache" (135–36). Here, "both writers and readers might damagingly misrecognize whether and where real conceptual work is getting done," but in the process—and here's the concession—the "insistence that everything means one thing somehow permits a sharpened sense of all the ways there are of meaning it" (136). Beginning with an explicitly argumentative summary opens space for a weaker or more "descriptive" mode.[16] A frankly tautological argument here offers "shelter" to "loosely related weak theories": the most important conceptual work is only visible after the larger argument has been acknowledged and dismissed (136). To reverse the order of Sedgwick's point: reduction threatens to obscure what is most valuable yet also makes space for those more nuanced observations. In her argument, the moment at which she seems about to dismiss Miller as the exemplary user of strong theory, he becomes a misrecognized champion of its opposite: not only in his use of "loosely related weak theories" but, somehow, in the way he performs himself, in the qualities that emphasize the ethos rather than the argument. Sedgwick's suggestion that people read *The Novel and the Police* not for the argument but for Miller himself underscores the big difference between a caricature of (say) Shakespeare's plays or the gothic genre and a caricature of another person's book. In the social environment of critical discourse, an ungenerous reading can be a mean one.

Let Me Be Mean for a Second: "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists"

The way you strategically reduce the dimensionality of a text in a digital project sheds light on the usefulness of caricaturing someone else's argument in literary criticism. Reading reductively—through an aggressively simplistic lens—can be a generative way to open up a new discussion.[17] It is a staple mode in a

form of textual criticism in which "mean" has long held sway: the periodical book review.

There are obviously many differences between professionalized literary critics and book reviewers, between the nineteenth century and our own, but they are linked by the fact of a writing life described by Dorothy Parker: "It's easier to write about those you hate—just as it's easier to criticize a bad play or a bad book" ("Art of Fiction No. 13," 79). In chapter 2, I consider the intersection of moralizing and style from a nineteenth-century critical perspective. To get there, I pull together nineteenth- and twentieth-century criticism with my reading of a "slashing article" written anonymously by Marian Evans before she turned to fiction as George Eliot.[18] This article seems to clear space for her subsequent literary project and functions as a meditation on what novels ought to be. Dillane argues that we ought to recall the periodical context of these essays before rushing to take their "bold statements at face value as articulations of a novelist's creed" (*Before George Eliot*, 81). We might take Dillane's point about the racy periodical context in a slightly different direction: how might the license of the hypercritical reviewer authorize and help formulate prescriptions for writing novels?

A treatment that is just plain mean, like caricature, might single out a feature to target for ridicule. This hostile act of "reducing" a text can be understood as reframing, clarifying a problem through a straightforward, stripped-down set of relevant terms, but it also violates the spirit of civil discourse. Anderson points out that the value of characterological caricature remains unclear: how does "mean" work in literary criticism?

The rhetoric of Eliot's essay, like that in the review of Riehl's *Natural History of German Life*, can be understood as an argument in for fine-grained discernment and reproduction of life as it is. Unlike the review of Riehl's book, however, the 1856 *Westminster Review* "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" is unrelentingly mean. In "Essay v. Novel," Jeff Nunokawa singles out this essay as starkly opposite to the mode of Eliot's novels, arguing that the novels demonstrate how "the meaning of what a man wills to write, say, or do cannot be told apart from the circumstances that brought on that will," which should prompt a fuller reckoning of their deeds, whereas the essays dismiss others instantly and peremptorily (200). "Having satisfied itself that those she prosecutes deserve no pity," Nunokawa claims, "the essay is more than pleased to give them none. . . . [The author] appears to take a puerile sadist's intent, intense delight in the easy target—a small sized aquarium to which she is happy to apply a Gatling

gun" (qtd. 197). In Nunokawa's argument, this review stands implicitly opposed to "German Life," that widely cited treatise on realist art and sympathy which signals, if briefly, a willingness to linger with readers. "Silly Novels" shares with that essay an investment in the representation of ordinary life, but instead of calling for fiction like Riehl's nonfiction, it calls for fiction unlike the novels under review. Moreover, as the title suggests, this essay reduces the novelists it describes, in part, to their gender: it is precisely to avoid being judged as a lady novelist that women like Marian Evans and Charlotte Brontë assumed pseudonyms. Laura Green observes that the most interesting thing about this essay, with its evident "lack of sisterly solidarity," is its resonance with Eliot's novels: "Rather than break with the feminine tradition of the 'mind-and-millinery' novel, Eliot attempts to revise it" ("George Eliot," 387). My argument is that Eliot's reductive meanness makes that program of reform possible: reducing these "silly" novels to their obtuse characterizations and formulae, Eliot imagines new possibilities for the form.

Eliot uses the title of her article to create a gendered map of the literary field. If her initial target is a set of unserious works at the intersection of a kind of upper-middle class femininity, the essay itself soon leads into an expanding taxonomy of types of silly novels. The meanness of the essay makes space for a playful treatment of a new conceptual category. Eliot's essay is an example of the power of a reductive organizing rubric: silly novels by lady novelists. The passage Nunokawa cites as evidence for why the novelists under review "deserve no pity" works toward the defining term of the essay: not woman novelists or female novelists but lady novelists: "We had imagined that destitute women turned novelists, as they turned governesses, because they had no other 'lady-like' means of getting their bread" (qtd. 197). But the silver-fork tone of the novels—their equally terrible portrayals of high life and middle life—mock-convinces the reviewer that this cannot be so: "If their peers and peeresses are improbable, their literary men, tradespeople, and cottagers are impossible; and their intellect seems to have the peculiar impartiality of reproducing both what they have seen and heard, and what they have not seen and heard, with equal unfaithfulness" (304).

The claims to represent a high life shared by the lady novelists and their characters are enough to dismiss sympathy grounded in a perception of the novelists as unfortunate women. The novels misrepresent common life and upper-class life with impartial and equal unfaithfulness. "Silly novels" satirizes the novel's style and unreality, the pastiche of the moment when a code be-

comes visible as a code, in the service of an aesthetic claim about the distance of a novel from real life. Eliot's argument is specific; the criteria for the examples she names are clear. When a heroine meets the man she is destined to love having only read about him in the paper, it "seemed as if a picture on which she had long gazed was suddenly instinct with life. . . . Was this reality?" Eliot responds: "Very little like it, certainly" (307). Eliot is working out a literary aesthetic through the clarity that satirical distance can produce. The most reductive element of this article, that is, is the argument embodied in its title, which makes way for a list of examples governed by gender interests and class pretensions: "The epithet 'silly' might seem impertinent, applied to a novel which indicated so much reading and intellectual activity as 'The Enigma' [which connotes 'neither more nor less than the existence of evil'], but we use this epithet advisedly. If, as the world has long agreed, a very great amount of instruction will not make a wise man, still less will a very mediocre amount of instruction make a wise woman" (311, 316–16). Silly is used "advisedly," in opposition to wisdom. The novel "indicates" reading and intellectual activity in the actions of its central figures rather than by demonstrating more than the "very mediocre" instruction of its author. Eliot's critical mode here reduces a body of silly novels to caricature and makes space for a more developed, nuanced version of the novel.

The Gift of Simplicity and the Power of Reduction

Attention to context and plurality of meaning, an attempt to recognize the organizing power of language and deconstruct the binary thinking responsible for so much structural and interpersonal oppression, is an important element of what literary critics can claim as our central and intellectual social contribution in the twentieth century. Such binaristic thinking, we have argued—and been educated to understand—makes our thought less precise and less sophisticated. Literature and interpretation have been central to intellectually progressive movements from the Frankfurt school to queer theory to third-wave feminism. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno returns three times to the threat of reducing human beings to the lowest common denominator, a term translator Dennis Redmond glosses as "*Gleichschaltung*, 'leveling,' notorious term of Nazi propaganda." In her introduction to *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that "obtuseness itself arms the powerful against their enemies" (7). There, bluntness is not only the quality of a weapon but the weapon itself.

Reductionism, even meanness, I maintain, is part of the apprehension of complexity. Consider "Who Said It Was Simple?," Audre Lorde's 1973 poem that poises identity-based protests (a women's march) against the poet's observations of subtle, overlapping acts of race- and gender-based oppression at a diner counter. Lorde's poem forces us to "see" in multiple ways at once: to read the scene through race and to read the scene through gender. But the strain of inhabiting both modes of consciousness, of being physically "bound" to both, as the poet is, threatens to tear her apart. If this anthem of third-wave feminism demonstrates how gender obscures other inequalities among women, it also demonstrates how being able to read a situation with such binaries in mind can make power visible.[19] This poem's depiction of an embodied experience of being read "reductively" draws a clear distinction between naturalized reductive social structures and reduction as a critical mode. Rather than focusing on the richly developed subjectivity of the speaker here, I want to call attention to the description of the other women in the poem, which gives their privilege away, as they sit, "discussing the problematic girls / they hire to make them free" (92).

Their own freedom is a mocking echo of the march for liberation that is about to happen, secured by the privilege of being able to pay other women, marked by the suggestively belittling term "girls," to take their place in the home. These lines make no explicit mention of color; the whiteness of the women is manifested in their unreflective dismissal and criticism of the women they pay. They are indistinguishable from one another and savor their white privilege unwittingly, as one element of the poem's larger social landscape. The moment of reduction here is the thesis to the poem's antithesis in which social identification by gender gives way to a plural identity. "The women" are viewed principally through the lens of their privilege, a whiteness invisible to them. One gift this poem gives the reader, in the caricature of the women who gather, is the power to see them through a lens other than gender. The nuanced reading of the poem depends on a simplified antagonist. The moment of reduction is partial, targeted, and—importantly—preliminary.

I have underlined the presence of the "reductive" move in critical manifestos to show how they work, dialectically, to construct a complex, intelligent response.[20] I would like to borrow from the digital humanities community some of the same candor about how and why we are reducing the topic at hand: Sedgwick makes space for Tomkins, Baker sets conceptual limits on a discussion of over a century's worth of engaged writing. Strong theory is strong not

only because of its tendency to abstraction but because that abstraction invites us to create a set of examples. Formulating a difficult problem in simplified but explicitly justified terms makes it possible to generate a set of examples that can lead to readings that are the opposite of reductive: expansive, intelligent, complicated, various.

This chapter has argued the major methodological contribution of computational analysis is not necessarily computational. Rather, computational analysis is important because it confronts the problem of its own simplistic approach. Reducing a problem to simpler terms can help you select a set of examples for more subtle analysis. To return to theoretical argument with this perspective in mind is to recognize how strong theory can shelter weak or descriptive readings and to recognize how "mean" can mark a new beginning.

The Victorian reviewers I take up in the following chapter believed that elements of literature (of novels and poems) worked together to shape a reader in tremendously important and tremendously complicated ways—and they did not play fair in calling attention to what they saw as unfairly manipulative novelistic practice. In their reviews, they draw a contrast between the duplicitously influential style of novels and their own demystifying candor. The reductive mode in this case focuses the argument in a way that makes space for detailed analysis of the moralizing as the reviewer sees it.

CHAPTER 2

The Shockingly Subtle Criticism of the *London Quarterly Review*, 1855–1861

> But for all practical purposes, criticism must be considered as one of the applied arts; and, in this character, its action is strictly *disciplinary*.
>
> THOMAS McNICOLL, *LONDON QUARTERLY REVIEW*, APRIL 1855

Victorian Moralizing in Novels and Criticism

The Victorian critical review, like the Victorian novel, has a tendency to punish the wicked and reward the good. It is, of course, the nature of a critical review to distribute punishments and rewards, but midcentury Victorian reviews are notorious for basing their judgments on a text's moral, as if really to determine whether the texts under discussion are "wicked" or "good." In this book about moralizing in Victorian fiction, I consider moralizing as something both novels and critics do: "To indulge in moral discussion; to draw a moral lesson from an event, etc.; to expound *on* (also *upon*) a subject moralistically" (as the *OED* has it). If novels can draw moral lessons from the world in their own pages, critics can, too—and they often did.

The big question posed by early- and mid-nineteenth-century critical reviews was not whether novels should teach, but how they should teach. Richard Stang points out that critics could condemn overt didacticism without questioning the moral purpose of art: "There are almost no critics of this period who would deny the moral purpose of art, but the best of them would rather make the art and the moral coincide with each other than have either one subserve the other" (*Theory of the Novel*, 69). In their overview of Victo-

rian novel theory, Edwin M. Eigner and George J. Worth frankly acknowledge the widespread belief that art should be improving: "The demand that a novel be moral was as least as frequently made as the requirement that it be real, and even though the majority of the better critics were against direct exhortation, morally improving fiction was popular throughout the period" (*Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, 7).[1] So how did critics write about the benefits of a novel that is both morally improving and not directly exhorting?

R. H. Hutton puts the problem in his own nineteenth-century terms, when he admires Dinah Mulock [Craik's] ability to give "*purpose* to her fictions without making them didactic," contrasting this kind of fiction with a didactic one "which so manages events as to point some very obvious moral, making all the mysterious complexities of life converge upon the punishment of some carefully selected fault, and the reward of the corresponding virtue" ("Novels by the Authoress of 'John Halifax,'" 480). In Hutton's hierarchy, better than didactic fiction is the "indifferent" school of fiction, in which character is depicted but not developed, and best of all is the fiction—for example, Craik's novel, *Agatha's Husband*—in which character develops in context of the plot (480). Hutton argued the case for the moral purpose of art against Algernon Charles Swinburne, leading Harold Orel to characterize him as "the classic case of a Victorian critic whose dedication to an informed moral judgment has undermined, for later critics, the value of his aesthetic pronouncements" (*Victorian Literary Critics*, 72). If Hutton is what the twentieth century held up as an example of a morally committed critic, E. S. Dallas illustrates the "sceptical view of the moral efficacy of literature" in David Skilton's *The Early and Mid-Victorian Novel* (64). Yet in *The Gay Science* (1866), Dallas pursues the question of how art might relate to moral good. The artist who pretends to teach may work against his best aims, but the artist who owns that he aims at pleasure can have a deeply powerful effect, like—say—that of Jesus:

> The avowed object of the poet is pleasure, and he seems to have his eye set only on present enjoyment, but it is like a rower, that looks one way and pulls another. Shenstone paints the village schoolmistress as disguised in looks profound. On the contrary, it was a reproach to the greatest of all teachers that he was a winebibber and a friend of sinners. The artist has still less the air of a teacher, and if he puts on the air of one, it sometimes happens that his influence is directly the reverse of his precepts. (2:161)

Despite his investment in the idea that the object of art is pleasure, then, Dallas maintains a notion that such pleasure can have a positive—a very positive—

moral influence. Dallas, developing this idea, adds that "It is not moral sermons which constitute the moral force of a novel: it is example" (2:163). The idea of influence—and of its mediation through language—is a key component of why style is an important place to look for nineteenth-century moralism. Such exemplarity is the focus of Andrew H. Miller's account of nineteenth-century ethics, *Burdens of Perfection*, which also takes a careful look at the language that mediates the relation between reader and exemplary other. He argues for the importance of a narrative of moral perfectionism, in which one becomes more perfect not through instruction or precept but through the influence of another. The literary and critical mechanism for this not overtly didactic approach is free indirect discourse: "As a voice of perfectionism, free indirect discourse intensifies the conditions of mutuality and separateness, makes them intense so as better to study them" (90). Miller argues that subtly shifting forms of intimacy are written into the very grammar of novels, thus allowing the reader to come into contact—through fiction—with an "exemplary other" (3). Critics, too, can inhabit this relation, which Miller associates with Stanley Cavell's ideal a philosophical love, the power "to accept intimacy without taking it personally" (89). Miller's account thus becomes, for me, a way to think about reading strategies that emphasize separateness over mutuality, that uses the language of novels to create distance between characters and readers, and to make a blended moral distinct from its narrative context. If the best novels were an amalgamation of aesthetic and moral development, and the critical review was an amalgamation of aesthetic and moral judgment, then it is worth taking a close look at critic and editor Thomas McNicoll, who shares the ideal of moral judgment as a flowing, shaping force—an influence that—as his April 1855 review of Tennyson makes clear—is a kind of current:

> Underlying all that wealth and beauty of expression, that play of fancy, that sparkling evanescent foam of imagery, the author's main design, like the strong current of a calm summer sea, carries his reader forward almost imperceptibly; and so lulling are the sights and measures which salute him,—so idle the green, white, cresting, and relapsing waves, so motionless the thin, pure, dappled fleeces of the upper sky,—that he can hardly persuade himself that he is drifted towards some grand conclusion, towards some island of rare loveliness and regenerating clime, towards some new continent of boundless treasure and dominion. ("Alfred Tennyson," 220)[2]

Against the poet's indistinctness, McNicoll understands his own role to depend on distinguishing the quality of the moral influence. He uses a chem-

ical metaphor to describe this imperceptible teaching in Tennyson: in "The Palace of Art" and "The Vision of Sin," a "fine vein of moral poetry subsists. But the most popular and perfect of our author's compositions do not present the moral element so distinctively: in these cases it is merely held in intimate solution, but in those it is cast down as a bright precipitate" (225). In these terms, a critical analysis that crystallizes a moral from its solution in a text becomes analogous to one form of chemical reduction. History has been mean enough to this form of argument—a critical evaluation based on a calculated moral effect of novels. In looking closely at the reading methods in a historical quarterly review, I instead consider this review on its own terms, as a reading practice that is designed to counteract the stylistic complexity of a text and thereby help readers see its morals more clearly. This chapter investigates the moralized reading practices in the *London Quarterly Review*, the "avowedly unofficial literary voice of Methodism."[3] In a period known for its moralizing, this journal's reviews demonstrate one way of performing moral reading: they emphasize separating the moral out from the art, which turns out to be a way of treating the text as an argument.

In her account of Victorian reviews of poetry, *Victorian Scrutinies*, Isobel Armstrong argues that "the morality of Victorian criticism depended almost exclusively on the way in which the notion of sympathy could be interpreted and it is through subtly changing, diverse, and even conflicting interpretations of the word that the moral demands made on poetry can be examined" (11). "Demands for clarity and simplicity of style, for 'distinct' language," she adds, "are associated with demands for what is common and familiar" (26). This is not the same kind of sympathy espoused by Dallas; sympathy for Dallas, according to Armstrong, is a "willingness to accept and explore a wider range of experience, subtlety and complexity in poetry" (57). Armstrong associates clarity with a form of sympathy that emphasizes a common good and unity, rather than a destabilizing plurality, of meaning.

Despite a strong emphasis on revealing a hidden truth about a text, the *London Quarterly Review*'s strategies for uncovering this truth are distinctly superficial in its attention to the importance of style. A series of reviews positively identified as written by McNicoll, anonymous "Brief Literary Notices," published during his tenure as editor of the magazine, and an anonymous article published in 1861, just after his tenure as editor, illustrate a range of reading strategies for dealing with different moral effects of a novel. These reviews use summary and paraphrase, as opposed to exegesis, as a way of decoding the

argument of a text with respect to its rhetoric. They pair a skeptical disposition with an attention to the text that is distinctly superficial. A habit of understanding fiction as rhetoric results in a model of reading that emphasizes bringing a novel's message to light through—or despite—its style.

My reconsideration of the protocols of mid-nineteenth-century criticism here resonates with recent moves toward "reparative disciplinary history" by Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan, which aim to draw connections across modes of criticism that seem very different. In one sense, the problem that faced critical reviewers then was the same that faced me when I started to explore moralizing in Victorian novels: in novels that are acknowledged to be didactic without exhortation, where, exactly, are the lessons? My consideration of a few basic methods (again: quotation, summary, paraphrase), connects twentieth- and twenty-first-century perspectives on these strategies with what I frame here as the prehistory of late-Victorian hermeneutics. I then consider the problem of style as a source of moral influence in essays that treat fictional texts as persuasive arguments on the same terms as critical essays and religious meditations. These critical judgments apply an explicitly ideological lens to the texts under discussion. The rest of the chapter focuses on how this strategy works in fiction in an 1861 essay titled "Novels and Novelists." There, the reexpression of novels through summary, paraphrase, and aggregated quotations, framed by critical commentary, is a deliberately reductive—but usefully transformative—reading practice.

Before Us: Dr. Thomas McNicoll of the Old School

Within the larger narrative of mixed aesthetic and moral judgment, there is a marked shift around the 1860s. To take a more finely grained look at the shape of moral and aesthetic judgment in Victorian criticism, we might mark, with Joanne Shattock and others, the emergence of a "new generation" of increasingly professionalized critics in the 1860s—one that included Hutton and Dallas.[4] As the critic gradually became an arbiter of taste instead of moral appropriateness in the nineteenth century, the central question of the critical review changed, too. That is, a mode of analysis that initially formed the basis for evaluating whether texts were suitable for readers—particularly vulnerable readers like women and children—became increasingly important for its own sake and more like criticism as we know it today.[5] McNicoll's death in 1863 roughly coincides with the birth of the more self-

conscious posture described by Shattock, though his work anticipates it in some respects.

McNicoll's essays were published at a time that, in hindsight, is marked by a shift away from the censorial review, when the distinctive amalgamation of aesthetic and moral judgment characteristic of the mid-nineteenth-century belletristic review was at its height and about to give way to more familiar forms of textual analysis. McNicoll tends to appear in modern accounts as an example of a historical reader that has come to seem naïve: he is perhaps best known for criticizing Robert Browning's *Men and Women* (1855) for its lack of "a preparatory statement which would help to make his subsequent effusion plain and logical" ("New Poems of William Landor and Robert Browning," 304). In John Woolford's analysis of literary criticism from 1855 to 1864 (that is, before critics were explicit about their standards and before they began taking the side of the poet rather than of readers) that compares reviews of Robert Browning's *Men and Women*, which everyone hated, to those of *Dramatis Personae,* which everyone liked, McNicoll is a vituperative and relatively unreflective reviewer typical of his period. For Andrew Elfenbein, McNicoll's writing appears as an example of historical readers who expect that the major cognitive work should happen during the reading process rather than after it (as in, for example, William Morris's reading of Browning): "The mapping of thought, not emotion, guides his standard of coherence for Browning" ("Cognitive Science," 493). These observations are consonant with the other reviews by McNicoll I consider here; as we shall see, McNicoll's concern with how "thought" takes shape during reading cuts across many of his reviews. In the larger context of the *London Quarterly Review*, a critic emerges as an intellectual filter for texts that might otherwise have a corrupting influence on the reader. This role is not primarily interpretive but "*disciplinary*," and a crucial part of that work is render dangerously opaque styles into clear prose ("Popular Criticism," 184).

This chapter, then, asks what we can learn from reading practices that were common just *before* the 1860s. The *London Quarterly Review* is not one of the most famous quarterlies: it is relatively mainstream, unglamorous, and explicitly sectarian.[6] Some its reviews are based on assumptions about texts that might seem have limited relevance to fiction: that texts work to prove a central idea and that the writer's rhetorical choices make that idea more or less clear and more or less convincing. What that looks like up close is less foreign, however, than one might think. Rohan Maitzen offers an alternative to the idea

that attention to the "argument" of a novel might prompt only summary modes of reading. Rather, she demonstrates, Victorian critics' interest in "treatment" "tacitly required" close reading" ("'The Soul of Art,'," 177).[7] These modes respond to implicit moralizing by reworking fictional prose to reveal messages hidden within the text.[8]

"Where distinctness and discrimination are particularly required": The *London Quarterly Review* on *Evangelical Meditations* and *Ministering Children*

The *London Quarterly Review* makes an interesting case study because it brings an explicitly sectarian perspective to belles-lettristic criticism. Indeed, James Harrison Rigg, who would cofound the magazine in 1853, called in 1840 for a periodical that would counter the stereotype of the unlettered Methodist and yet promote Christian values: "Works of a purely literary character should be reviewed, but reviewed in a xtian spirit" (Houghton, "The *London Quarterly Review*," 371).[9] The *London Quarterly Review*, like other reviews of the period, puts fiction and poetry in the context of other works in political economy, religious criticism, history, and natural history. The reviewer demands a clarity of style from more religiously inflected and more secular works. For example, in January 1859 Alexander Vinet's *Evangelical Meditations* gets panned for its lack of argumentative clarity: "A superabundance of figurative terms, and of elaborate illustration, often covers the want of precision and accuracy, and even brings statements on important points into sad confusion" (565). If we might expect—as the reviewer did—that "meditations" might be held to a standard of doctrinal accuracy, it is surprising to come across a full-length article in the same issue that condemns a novel by Maria Louisa Charlesworth (who "has lately become known in thousands of our nurseries by her *Ministering Children*") on the grounds that in her second novel, she "has pandered to the prevailing taste for feeling instead of faith, has spoken most vaguely where distinctness and discrimination were peculiarly required, and has given full reins to a fancy that on such subjects needs the most careful restraint" (414–15). The reviewer faults both books for a lack of precision, though one is a book of "meditations" and the other a religious novel. This suggests an evenness of treatment of fiction and nonfiction: in the novel, as in the "meditations," the fit between form and idea is a central question for the critic.[10] Important subjects demand precision, accuracy, distinctness, and discrimination. Such concepts

are judged by the "same rule" when they appear implicitly in fiction as when they announce themselves as "meditations."

The epigraph for this chapter is from an 1855 essay by McNicoll titled "Popular Criticism" that defines the role of the critic. I began from the commonplace that Victorian criticism aims to punish the wicked and reward the good; here is McNicoll's description of the role of the critic in that essay: "Our professional critics form now a large and influential body; but they have no legislative function. They are simply an organized police, bound to maintain order and decorum in the republic of letters or, at most, they are its magistrates, set 'for the punishment of evil-doers, and the praise of them that do well' " (184.) In the 1861 preface to a collection of his essays, McNicoll singles out this essay on criticism in its customary prefatory apology for reprinting ephemera, noting that "[the author] believes the critical portions of this volume may still be of some service in correcting some of the vices of our popular literature; and this belief must form his apology for retaining certain strictures, as in the *Essay on Popular Criticism*, which he would otherwise have chosen to omit" (x–xi). Here, he underlines the importance of literary "censorship" in calling attention to the dangers of style. McNicoll's emphasis on the sheer importance of style in its propensity to reflect something of the author and to shape the reader's reception is in keeping with Jason Camlot's treatment of nineteenth-century critical style. Camlot's notion of a "critically mannered sincerity" highlights the importance of a critic's self-expressivity in relation to the audience and the market. The key question for McNicoll remains how the qualities of a critic's mind betrayed by his style are likely to affect his readers.

"Popular Criticism" argues that style is an important element of literary criticism as well as religious reflections and fiction: "There is the closest possible relation and interaction between the form and substance of literary works. . . . In style we have, therefore, an indication as well as an instrument of truth" (179).[11] McNicoll goes on to argue that "it may surprise some readers to speak of the moral worth of mere works of taste; it will surprise them yet more to assert the immoral tendency of productions grossly deficient in this quality" (179). Yet "much evil is to be apprehended" in "a criticism which runs riot among follies it was invented to restrain, which knows neither discrimination nor temper, which deals out hasty and wholesale measures of admiration and disgust, which confounds human genius with divine inspiration, and brackets the all-unequal names of holy Prophets and profane and faithless poets" (180). The essay is a review of two volumes by George Gilfillan: *A Third Gallery of*

Portraits (1854) and *The Bards of the Bible* (1852). A key part of McNicoll's reading examines the moral consequences of Gilfillan's habit of comparison. To demonstrate how far Gilfillan's writing is below Macaulay's, McNicoll quotes Gilfillan's reversal of Macaulay's comparison of Plato and Bacon:

> Had our space permitted, we should have been glad to offer these rival compositions to the reader in collateral columns. . . . A single sentence, chosen in all fairness from either estimate, will suffice to indicate the characters of both. The philosophy of Plato," says Mr. Macaulay, "began in words, and ended in words. The philosophy of Bacon began in observation, and ended in acts." See now how Mr. Gilfillan turns the tables: —"Bacon cured corns, and Plato heals consciences!". . . If both critics sacrifice a share of truth to the love of verbal antithesis, it is only Mr. Gilfillan who outrages taste and judgment for the sake of paltry alliteration. (197)

Gilfillan's style would, ideally, have been presented here side-by-side with Macaulay's, the sentences stripped out from the paragraphs in which they appear to facilitate sentence-level comparison. The two sentences McNicoll chooses illustrate an argument that (as he puts it later in the essay) asserts "the intimate connexion between just criticism and moral truth, between trashy and unworthy literature and falsehood of the most dangerous sort" (197). Leaving aside (as McNicoll says he does, before making it a central concern) the problem that the author compares an inspired Edmund Burke to Moses on the Mount, the purpose of criticism is to restrain follies, and it can do harm by perpetuating them. The *Bards of the Bible* comes out better than the *Third Gallery,* but it is especially clear here that "the distinctive inspiration of the sacred bards is not, indeed, denied, but they are forced unceremoniously into profane company, and compared at random with modern and even living authors, till the reader is apt to suppose them all of one guild" (201). Here, "literary falsehood is pernicious, not in proportion to its magnitude or malice, but to its unsuspected character, to its alliance with the semblance of some, and the reality of other, virtues, to its appeal to the vain imaginations and idle prejudices of the reader" (180). The crucial role of literary "censorship" is to teach the reader to distinguish—to suspect—literary falsehood.

Novels and Novelists

Victorian reviews tend to be read for the statements they make about novels in general or else for the statements they make about novels in particular. To

consider carefully the relationship between judgment of a book and the methods for reducing it, I turn to a form that is somewhat difficult to deal with in its miscellany: the omnibus review. I discuss a portion of an 1861 review titled "Novels and Novelists" that is dedicated to *Adam Bede* (1859); the review is anonymous, but it might as well have been written by Tom Tulliver of *Mill on the Floss*.[12] Nicholas Dames notes that modern editions of Victorian criticism often leave out the extracts; here, the context of the larger review and, as I have argued, of the periodical, make the reviewer's interest in subtle communication and something like free indirect discourse much more clear. Here, I examine one treatment of a range of novels that nevertheless prompts different critical reading strategies, adapted to the moral reading of each text.[13] The reviewer in "Novels and Novelists" compares his task to a chemist's analysis of sugar:

> As our bodily food, the common experience of mankind determines whether sugar is eatable or not, and afterwards the chemist determines whether sugar is adulterated or not; but finally, each individual must determine whether sugar agrees with him or not. . . . [I]t is the part of the analyzer to test each particular example, and discover how much is nourishment and how much is sweet clay or poison. (283)

The purpose of the review, then, is to discriminate between nourishment and poison in order to prepare the reader to determine, with respect to the sugar, whether it agrees with him. What I want to call attention to first is the oddly concrete way in which "sugar" is separated from "poison" in this review through the selection of quotations that exaggerate an underlying claim in order to make the central ideas behind the text evident to the reader, creating an experience of the novels under review that is mediated by critical analysis. Since "if the novel-reader catches anything from the novelist, he does it by sympathy, not by reflection," the review offers criticism as a way to intellectualize the experience of reading—both performing and modeling the process of analysis (296). The reviews in this journal ask what each *text* is for—what is its argument, what are its central ideas, and what is its influence likely to be? This mode of reading reduces the text up front, as a way to open it up for analysis.

Block Quotation

Reviews in the major midcentury periodicals often reproduced large blocks of text as if they spoke for themselves; passages are quoted and pithily summed

up (as opposed to thoughtfully unpacked) by the reviewer.[14] As anyone familiar with nineteenth-century reviews in their original or asterisk-edited forms knows, they often alternate between providing general commentary and quoting long blocks of text. Quotation practices vary not only from periodical to periodical and reviewer to reviewer but also within a single review, which might touch on a number of works but quote at length from only a few. Here, I examine the connective tissue among extracts in Victorian reviews and their connection to other forms of argument: how extracts are chopped up and reorganized, thrown into relief by plot summary, and satirically paraphrased by the critic.

In the nineteenth century in particular, block quotations *do* (in a sense) let passages speak for themselves. Rather than highlighting the special interpretive powers of the critic, Nicholas Dames has argued, this method "implies some sense of a common range of reading, a response that almost all readers would have" ("On Not Close Reading," 25). His reflection on critical protocol puts words to a tacit assumption in literary criticism of the period that readers of the same text would respond to it in the same way.[15] He uses Margaret Oliphant's 1862 reading of sensation novels to suggest that the passages produce sensation in the reader of the review, just as they would in a reader of the novel, "as if to say: did you feel that? Did you feel how much you enjoyed it, and how little you thought while feeling it?" (18). Oliphant quotes a long passage from Collins to create an experience of sensation within a larger critical reflection. By contrast, the *London Quarterly Review* critic uses summary to frame passages *against* the shape of the larger novel. If literary criticism in the *London Quarterly Review* calls attention to the moral effects of style on the reader, it does so by acknowledging that style, like sensation, might register below the level of conscious apprehension.

The connection between reader and character can be disrupted by putting plot in so many words, but the review of *Vanity Fair* in "Novels and Novelists" reveals the degree to which reading for the moral can mean reading against plot. The review hews closely to the text of the novel itself, almost as in a process of transliteration, a letter-by-letter reproduction of the novel in a new alphabet capable of rendering the text's moral visible. *Vanity Fair* is "brilliant, entertaining, life-like (as far as life is bad and base); but if we plunge beneath the sparkling surface, it is a dreary book" (292). To prove the point, to show how the novel "holds [our neighbours'] actions up in all their possible selfishness and falseness," the reviewer indexes satirical passages, which she or he

orders by the values they compromise, to demonstrate how a kind of despair colors the wit of *Vanity Fair*: "Are we so silly to imagine that there is such a thing as disinterested service and love? Pooh!— / "What love, what fidelity, what constancy, is equal to a nurse with good wages?" and so on (292). I add the chapter numbers from which the excerpts are drawn to give a sense of how the reviewer rearranges the novel:

> As for affection [ch. 9] . . . As for kindred ties [ch. 47] . . . Don't let us trust anyone, dear friends. Not our lovers [ch. 13] . . . Not our wives [ch. 17] . . . Not our kind friends' thoughts and remembrance [ch. 31] . . . Not in such an old-fashioned thing as constancy [ch. 20] . . . But we must eat the fruit of these ways, my brothers [ch. 20] . . . How should we not be miserable and depressed, when good people in this upside-down world are the only ones who do *not* eat the fruit of their ways? [ch. 57] . . . O what a dreary book! Give us its narrative, its comedy, its brilliant jesting and wit, and let us laugh and be merry; but spare us these reflections, O bitter cynic, if you would not drive us to despair. (294).

Thackeray's witticisms must be collected—and framed by the reviewer's inserted commentary—to show how comprehensively they debunk key values (see figure). By bringing these passages together and organizing them by topic, the reviewer emphasizes the relentless cynicism he sees in *Vanity Fair*. The heading "Not in Such an Old-Fashioned Thing as Constancy" highlights Thackeray's own habit of adducing examples to show a single pattern in its variety—its comprehensiveness, almost. Thackeray's catalogue of the lack of constancy by a friend, a sister, a child, a lover gives evidence for the reviewer's point that there is no refuge from the novel's grim paradigm. The full list of citations ranges back and forth through the novel, reorganizing the information into a catalogue.

Many of these passages are, indeed, important—the lightness with which constancy and remembrance are dismissed (the vanishing ink of *Vanity Fair*) remains a touchstone for reading the novel. Here, to make visible Thackeray's project to "proclaim" that life is "all hollowness," however, the "reflections" have to be analyzed in aggregate. The reviewer offers this collection of passages as evidence of how the charm of the novel is based on a deep cynicism; as Chris Rovee puts it, this list of examples "claims to be rational and orderly, relative to the mystifications of narrative technique."[16] The risk the novel poses lies in those pieces the reviewer likes: "Give us its narrative, its comedy, its brilliant jesting and wit, and let us laugh and be merry; but spare us these reflections, O bitter cynic, if you would not drive us to despair" (294). This selection of

great prince, such as my Lord Steyne, must naturally be angry at being kept out of his kingdom, and eye the occupant of it with no very agreeable glances. "Take it as a rule," this sardonic old Eaves would say, "the fathers and elder sons of all great families hate each other. .....If you were heir to a dukedom and a thousand pounds a day, do you mean to say you would not wish for possession? Pooh! And it stands to reason that every great man, having experienced this feeling towards his father, must be aware that his son entertains it towards himself; and so they can't but be suspicious and hostile." '

Don't let us trust any one, dear friends. Not our lovers, lest, while we picture them 'bivouacking, or attending the couch of a wounded comrade, or studying the art of war in their own desolate chamber,' our angel-thoughts happily find the barrack gates shut, and cannot pass through to 'hear the young fellows roaring over their whiskey-punch.' Not our wives; for

'the best of women are hypocrites. We don't know how much they hide from us: how watchful they are when they seem most artless and confidential: how often those frank smiles which they wear so easily, are traps to cajole or elude or disarm. I don't mean it in your mere coquettes, but your domestic models and paragons of female virtue.....A good housewife is of necessity a humbug; and Cornelia's husband was hoodwinked as Potiphar was—only in a different way.'

Not our friends' kind thoughts and remembrance:—

'Did we know what our intimates and dear relations think of us, we should live in a world that we should be glad to quit, and in a frame of mind, and a constant terror, that would be perfectly unbearable. .....Could the best and kindest of us who depart from the earth have an opportunity of revisiting it, I suppose he or she would have a pang of mortification at finding how soon our survivors were consoled. And so Sir Pitt was forgotten—like the kindest and best of us—only a few weeks sooner.'

Not in such an old-fashioned thing as constancy:—

'Perhaps in Vanity Fair there are no better satires than letters. Take a bundle of your dear friend's of ten years back—your dear friend whom you hate now. Look at a pile of your sister's: how you clung to each other till you quarrelled about the twenty pound legacy! Get down the round-hand scrawls of your son, who has half broken your heart with selfish undutifulness since: or a parcel of your own, breathing endless ardour and love eternal, which were sent back by your mistress when she married the nabob—your mistress, for whom you now care no more than for Queen Elizabeth. Vows, love, promises, confidences, gratitude, how queerly they read after a while! .....The best ink for Vanity Fair use would be one that faded utterly in a couple of days, and left the paper clean and blank, so that you might write on it to somebody else.'

"Novels and Novelists," 293. © The British Library Board P.P.5989.b.

passages depicts the experience of the novel as it would look without the narrative material. The reviewer's concluding plea to "spare us these reflections" is opposed to the method of the review itself: this version of *Vanity Fair* consists *only* of the dangerous reflections to which the reviewer wishes to call attention.

Summary

Summary—a key feature of the nineteenth-century review—is too often overshadowed by the long extracts it serves to connect. The technique of summary and quotation pits sentences in a scene against the moral outcomes of a novel's plot, a method that continues to surface in politically- or ethically centered modes of criticism. It calls attention to passages that evoke sympathy by framing long quotations with plot summary.

How do the two forms of condensing relate? It is worth beginning with an acknowledgment that a discussion of summary risks heading into "throughout time" territory, and it certainly remains a key part of English criticism and writing. Leah Price observes that, pace Cleanth Brooks's claim that paraphrase is heresy, "plot summary, on the one hand, and quoting out of context, on the other, continue to underpin our arguments" (*The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*, 13).[17] Price makes this observation to demonstrate the importance of tracking the trajectories of different forms of condensing texts, paying special attention (in a book on anthologies) to the role of the extract. I focus here on summary and the other major critical strategy especially relevant to censorial or cautionary criticism: paraphrase.

The long review of "Novels and Novelists" explicitly considers how a wide range of books might affect readers. Between a new attention to disciplinary protocol and the incredible sources easily available on line, it is an exciting time for periodical study. Yet challenges persist: Meredith McGill has pointed out that in reprinting collections of essays we "have rescued anonymous and pseudonymous texts from their disseminated condition and reissued them in standard, multivolume authors' editions, creating composite figures and bodies of work that did not exist and could not have existed in the era in which these texts were written" (*American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting*, 3). How to reduce the mass of journalistic ephemera into a form one can analyze closely? As is perhaps already clear, my sense of the broader culture is built on the work of experts in periodical discourse, the religious press, and Victorian literary aesthetic theory. I have also worked, like others, from collections of re-

THE

LONDON REVIEW.

JULY, 1861.

ART. I.—1. *Oceola.—The War Trail.* By MAYNE REID.
2. *Felicita.—The Romance of Agostini.* Blackwood.
3. *The Neighbours.* By MISS BREMER.
4. DICKENS's *Works.*
5. *Framley Parsonage.—The Three Clerks.—The Bertrams.* By ANTHONY TROLLOPE.
6. *Vanity Fair.—The Newcomes.* By THACKERAY.
7. *Hypatia.* By CHARLES KINGSLEY.
8. *Adam Bede.—The Mill on the Floss.* By GEORGE ELIOT.
9. *Tom Brown's School Days.—Tom Brown at College.*
10. *The Caxtons.* By SIR EDWARD LYTTON BULWER.
11. *The Heir of Redclyffe.* By MISS YONGE.
12. *Zanoni.* By SIR EDWARD LYTTON BULWER.

IT is useless to shut our eyes to the fact that fiction, so long exposed to undiscriminating reproach, has stepped at last into a certain place among the literary 'powers that be.' Thirty years ago many sober people had strong things to say against fiction. Some averred that, like olives, it was nauseous to the natural taste; and that the child's invariable question, 'Is it a true story?' attested the first uncorrupted instincts of youth. Some went so far as to declare that fiction was falsehood, because it was not fact. Fairy tales were banished from the nursery not less rigorously than three-volume novels were declared contraband in the parlour, thirty years ago. Such restrictions were then possible. Children

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Index to "Novels and Novelists," 281. © The British Library Board P.P.5989.b.

views of individual authors or specific works. Yet those are not only—as Dames has observed—missing the juicy extracts that comprised much of their length but are often excised from larger, more far-ranging discussions. I came across the one shown in the opposite figure in Carroll's *Critical Heritage of George Eliot*—a "bad" (condemnatory review) of *Adam Bede* that turns out to have been part of this article.

As you might imagine, the books are not all given equal attention. Five novels under review in "Novels and Novelists" are judged—glancingly, with summary only and no quotations at all—in one and a half pages (310–11).[18] The review opens and closes with about two pages of general reflection on novel reading, and, of the nineteen books named in it, the first five books are covered in the one and a half pages at the beginning and the last four in about one page of text near the end of the article. Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown* novels in particular demonstrate the reviewer's trust that some novels can be left to summary, as two books are pulled together in a single sentence: "Tom Brown, the boy at school, struggling against his own heedlessness and lawlessness, and finding help in the help he gives;—the same boy at college, struggling against the same foes in their adult form, with a glimmering insight that the secret of his whole life battle is to be found in help given and received" (310). No harm, no foul: the repetitive didactic structure of *Tom Brown* requires no punitive analysis. Authors like Anthony Trollope or Charles Kingsley, of whom the reviewer largely approves, are represented by the kinds of speaking-for-themselves block quotes Dames describes.[19] More often than not, the reviewer counsels resistance to the nearly imperceptible charm of style, but in works by the (by and large) approved novelist Anthony Trollope, the passages the reviewer quotes call attention to the positive influence of invisible style. Trollope's wholesomeness lies in his ability to manage readerly affect without narrative intervention, and the review uses plot summary to demonstrate that "poetical justice" has been distributed without the reader's attention being drawn to it: a form of influence effective because invisible (287). In summing up the moral of *The Three Clerks* simultaneously with its plot (again, the two being satisfactorily imbricated), the reviewer remarks, "Not that Anthony Trollope ever says anything like this; it is one of his great merits, that he narrates without perpetually stopping to moralize. He shows us what he wants us to see, and makes his speakers say what he wants us to hear, scattering here and there his own maxims of good-humoured, serviceable worldly-wisdom" (287). The distinction between "moralizing" and "maxims" associates "moralizing" with explicit

narrative management of the reader and maxims with freestanding reflections that have little effect on how the reader judges the characters.[20] Trollope's novels are exemplary because they coordinate readerly sympathy with the distribution of justice in the novel. Trollope is good because what he insinuates (a morality that is "sound and true, as far as it goes") is in line with what he says directly, as it were, through the plot (288).[21] For the author of "Novels and Novelists," Trollope's style works so smoothly with "the great social machine" that no further comment is required. The author uses moralized summary to make explicit what Trollope's novel expresses obliquely. To demonstrate that Fanny Robarts from *Framley Parsonage* is "a perfect woman, without the flatness that generally belongs to perfection," the critic reproduces a page of dialogue between her and her husband (286). Here, her husband tells her of his debt, a burden of which "this wife cheerfully, gladly, thankfully took her share" (287).[22] In "Novels and Novelists," the problem is not that literature works obliquely. In fact, its premise is that "if the novel-reader catches anything from the novelist, he does it by sympathy, not by reflection": hence the need for an analyst and the models of analysis offered by the review (296).[23] The reader owes it to herself, and the text, to maintain a discriminating analytical stance with respect to the text.[24]

Not that Anthony Trollope ever says anything like this. This is one of those moves that connects Victorian reading practices with contemporary strategies. David Kurnick attends to scenes of dialogue in Henry James precisely in order to disrupt a traditional critical focus on the moral trajectories of James's plots. The reviewer's rejection of discourse in favor of story is oddly resonant Kurnick's reading of Robert Pippin's use of plot synopsis to reveal the "moral valence" of *The Wings of the Dove*—: "One wants to respond, 'Well, if you put it that way. . .' But James never does put it that way" (*Empty Houses*, 217).[25] The "Novels and Novelists" reviewer uses plot to disrupt what she or he fears might be a distracting attention to the texture of a novel that covers up the plot.

Summary is as important as quotation in calling attention to the obfuscatory effects of style and for teaching readers to recognize those effects. The reviewer embeds a passage of *Adam Bede* in a summary of the plot to show how "the folly and the evil results are drawn by a master-hand; but the coarseness, baseness, and guiltiness of [Arthur's] whole conduct are so skillfully thrown into the shade, that we do not believe any reader would guess the extent of the wrong he has done" (305). This reviewer pays attention to language when she or he pays attention to morals, and summary proves to be a central com-

ponent of teaching the reader to see the rhetorical impact of fictional—and nonfictional—texts.

The *London Quarterly Review* is explicitly engaged in decoding texts for readers, but it does so by relying on what it takes to be ostensible evidence. Plot summary in the magazine serves suspicious or symptomatic reading yet also, in the reductiveness of its method, resonates with the "surface reading" of Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus: "The moments that arrest us in texts need not be considered symptoms, whose true cause exists on another plane of reality, but can themselves indicate important and overlooked truths" ("Surface Reading," 18). Plot means something, but it doesn't mean everything—style means something, but it doesn't mean everything. The *London Quarterly Review* is explicitly engaged in decoding texts for readers, but it does so by relying on what it takes to be obvious evidence.

In the plot summary that serves to throw free indirect style into relief in *Adam Bede*, the reviewer cuts out half the story: "Next on our list follows a bold conception: a novel half immoral, half Dissenting; a tale of seduction, relieved by Methodist sermons and prayers!" (301).[26] The "Dissenting" element of *Adam Bede* centers on the character Dinah, a Methodist preacher who eventually marries Adam Bede. The reviewer's summary leaves Dinah—and, except in his relation to Hetty, also Adam himself—out of the novel.[27] This major elision is the first argumentative element of the summary: "Arthur Donithorne [*sic*], the generous, honourable, kind-hearted young squire, falls in love with pretty Hetty Sorrel; and blindly, and almost unresistingly, abandons himself to the impulses which are certain to bring disgrace on himself and ruin to his victim" (301–2).[28] As the satirical emphasis on Arthur's qualities and his behavior suggests, the reviewer finds the central problem of *Adam Bede* to be the deceptively indirect portrayal of characters and their choices. By opening with a summary of a novel that the reviewer acknowledges is "a favourite among thoughtful and religious people," the review attempts to counter the novel's indirectness: "We doubt if one reader in twenty has ever placed these facts fairly before his own judgment, or given them their right names,—so skilfully are they veiled under inference and silence, so skilfully alternated with the better parts of the story" (302). With *Adam Bede*, the reader is particularly vulnerable to catching something immoral by sympathy because the veil of "inference and silence" obfuscates the novel's immorality. Whereas elsewhere the reviewer lets authorial style speak for itself, the purpose of this part of the review is to argue that the rhetorical effect of Eliot's style to condone the behavior of Hetty and,

especially, Arthur. The reviewer restates not only the plot but also the novel's moral:

> By the skill of an accomplished author he [*sic*] puts guilt and responsibility out of sight, raises from circumstances an extenuating plea, invests natural character with excusing force, makes the consequences of wrongdoing more prominent than the wrongdoing, the sufferings of sin more prominent than sin, and then demands leniency for offenders, not because we too have fallen, but because they could scarcely choose but fall. Well may they hope for leniency in judgment who drag down the standard that alone condemns them: their religion is the religion of "I could not help it," and the plea that excuses others excuses themselves. We are far from saying that this is ever present in such express words; such a masterly writer does not need to do so: but he always contrives to present to the mind of his readers the idea of our helplessness to resist evil. (306–7)[29]

For the reviewer, the problem with *Adam Bede* lies not in plot or character alone but in the style of their representation. If one of Trollope's great merits is leaving the moral operation of the story implicit—"he never *says* anything like this"—Eliot's greatest fault is that her excusing message is never present in "express words."[30] Eliot's text requires the analyst to restate the plot's events in order to set "facts fairly before [the reader's] judgment" and to give them "their right names." *Adam Bede* is characterized by "artistic skill which hides its evil beneath its good," making the novel in a sense doubly bad by obscuring the bad central message. The reviewer hates the element of Eliot's text that is the focus of the next chapter in this book: how narrative commentary is woven into the story. "The literary machinery by which this is effected, consists of a minute unhealthy analysis of feelings and impulses, to which the action of the will is made subordinate" (306–7). This argument sets the stage for a sustained attack on the mode of moralizing present in *Adam Bede* and *Mill on the Floss*: free indirect discourse.[31]

Paraphrase: Critical Free Indirect Discourse and the Problem of Sympathy

To begin, the *London Quarterly Review* reads for the moral by reworking novels in plain language. Thus the "Novels and Novelist" reviewer assumes that the reader is likely to catch meaning "by sympathy, not by reflection" and is primarily concerned with fatally exemplary others. I use the problem of bad

company because the dangerous novels of "Novels and Novelists" have an inverse relationship to Andrew H. Miller's argument about ethics and reading in the period: Miller focuses on the exemplary other and the textual strategies for narrating how one might come to recognize and resemble that other; the central problem here is of unexemplary characters whom one might come to resemble *without* coming to recognize that. This moral intervention aims to break the spell of an ethical relationship between reader and characters or the narrator.

The reviewer offers a satirical stylistic corrective to the skillful presentation of immoral ideas in Eliot by transforming key passages of narrative discourse into a more direct narrative statements. In the passages listed in the following table, note the continual rephrasing of Eliot's qualified claims and rhetorical questions as first-person or imperative statements. The first two passages on the left are quoted in the review—as in Thackeray, in an order opposite to their appearance in the novel—and the third is only paraphrased in the review (302–6). As McNicoll wished to compare Gilfillan to Macaulay to track the relationship between their styles, I give the quotations from the novel and the review (which closely, satirically, track the passages) side-by-side.

Note the first-person pluralization of statements from the novel: it is not that a man has moods to be overcome but that "we" are governed by them; a generalization about how one "strong, determined soul" may learn fellow feeling (that answers a question about how "we" are to learn it) becomes in the review an explicit, inclusive directive: "We must get our heart-strings bound round the weak and erring." The reviewer "answers" the message of *Adam Bede* by collecting narrative generalizations that permeate the text and restyling them into direct appeals. Having previously offered Trollope's serviceable, worldly maxims for consideration, the reviewer now disembeds Eliot's maxims from their narrative contexts to demonstrate their unfitness for general application. In this review, indirect style is a separable formal component of the story powerful enough to veil the shape of the story itself; the reviewer's corrective style becomes the means of making that shape apparent to the reader. The reviewer dismembers and rewrites Eliot's moral style to reveal what she or he sees as its immorality in appealing to readerly sympathy for guilty characters while obscuring that appeal through free indirect discourse. Both plot summary and parodic paraphrase work to "reveal" what the author is really saying. This review is typical in its reliance on block quotes and in its concern with morality. Up close, though, it is also possible to see this reader wrangling

Passages from *Adam Bede* vs. Reviewer's Paraphrase

Adam Bede passages cited in "Novels and Novelists" (302–4)	*Adam Bede* passages paraphrased in "Novels and Novelists" (305–6)
[When Arthur pleads with the rector Mr. Irwine that one might be governed by "moods," Irwine responds,] "Ah, but the moods lie in his nature, my boy, just as much as his reflections did, and more. A man can never do anything at variance with his own nature. He carries within him the germ of his most exceptional action" (ch. 26).	"we are governed by 'moods' which lie in our nature—the nature against which we can never be at variance."
[A certain "hardness" Adam sees in himself is attributed to "too little fellow-feeling," which one can only learn] "by getting his heart-strings bound round the weak and erring, so that he must share not only the outward consequence of their error, but their inward suffering" (ch. 19).	"Therefore, instead of harshly condemning others less strongly built than ourselves, we must have patience and charity towards our stumbling, falling companions. We must get our heart-strings bound round the weak and erring, so that we may share their inward suffering."
Adam Bede passage not cited in "Novels and Novelists"	
"The way in which I have come to the conclusion that human nature is lovable—the way I have learnt something of its deep pathos, its sublime mysteries—has been by living a great deal among people more or less commonplace and vulgar" (ch. 27).	"Human nature is loveable in itself, and even in common-place and vulgar people we shall find deep pathos and sublime mysteries. This is the religion of 'Adam Bede.' "

with the language of novels and reshaping them to reveal the moral he or she feels they contain.[32]

When J. Hillis Miller excerpts a passage from chapter 27 that precedes the one quoted in the table in *The Ethics of Reading*, he leaves the first-person pronoun in place, as if to take responsibility for his reading of the text, but he emphasizes instead its economic metaphor: "I have only so much love and reverence banked in my account of emotional savings, and I 'can't afford' to squander it on ideal rarities, if indeed they exist at all. All my emotion is needed for those who are near at hand, those 'more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people,' my neighbors" (70). In Miller's argument, language "redirects those words to unheard of meanings. . . . This happening has no 'basis' other than the fictive,

figurative, reevaluation performed by the catachresis renaming one's ugly, stupid, inconsistent neighbors as lovable" (74). Miller, too, stays close to the language, as if to demonstrate the moral dwelling inside it (how words refer not to the text but the law to which the text is subject). Paraphrase reveals what was implicit in the words themselves.

Conclusion

In *Poetic Justice*, Martha Nussbaum argues that the value of literature for "public life" lies in the reader's exposure to and—most relevant here—the reader's investment in particular characters. Andrew H. Miller calls attention to the role of bad examples only parenthetically, arguing that the ideal relation with others is "defined in part by contrast" with unexemplary others (*Burdens of Perfection,* 89). Miller follows Stanley Cavell and quotes D. A. Miller's description in *Jane Austen, or; The Secret of Style* of Austen's "ostentatiously close" perspective, which offers us "the experience of a character's inner life as she herself lives it, and an experience of the same inner life as she never could" (60). D. A. Miller continues: "Though the irony that thus always accompanies free-indirect style necessarily severs the identification with character, it nonetheless still presupposes it as one of its terms. Indeed, only in being severed, 'lost,' does this identification acquire fantastic force; only at the point of no return does it come back as a haunting opposition" (60). For D. A. Miller, Austen's style longs for the collapse of ironic distance, and the quality of identification he describes is central to the ethics of Andrew Miller's account. The chemical analyst of the *London Quarterly Review* emphasizes irony to disrupt this mystic interaction—if some books are too easy to identify with, the critic's job is to keep that from happening. Deirdre Lynch's *Economy of Character* argues that the turn from eighteenth- to nineteenth-century fiction happened when "novel readers turned from collecting moral exemplars to pleasing themselves with the examples of their own sympathetic capacities" (12), but in censorial reviews, this kind of reading becomes a problem because they are almost exclusively concerned with the *use* to which sympathy is put. Such reviews simultaneously attempt to locate the power of fiction in fictional character—and to emphasize the rhetorical construction of fictional persons.

That is, we should choose carefully the company we keep. Nussbaum stands with Wayne Booth in Amanda Anderson's account of the turn to ethics as someone practicing "a more traditional and specifically literary ethics" (*The*

Way We Argue Now, 8). Indeed, Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction* ends with a defense of morality as the end purpose of art in a way that anticipates his later focus in *The Company We Keep*. Booth is explicitly in dialogue with nineteenth century reviews: he works from Stang on Victorian novel theory and also from Trollope himself, who finds it difficult to maintain a moral or judgmental stance relative to character because of his intimacy with the narrator. Trollope observes that Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon* "is so written that it is almost impossible not to entertain something of a friendly feeling for him. . . . The reader is so carried away by his frankness and energy as almost to rejoice when he succeeds, and to grieve with him when he is brought to the ground" (*Thackeray*, 71). In Trollope's tracks, then, Booth takes an epigraph for the chapter titled "The Price of Impersonal Narration, I: Confusion of Distance," from *Barry Lyndon*.[33] Booth's concern about the distance between the reader and the text is not only in harmony with nineteenth-century critical culture, but his strategies for establishing that distance are as well. Consider his treatment not of the good guys but of a bad guy, namely, Louis-Ferdinand Céline. Booth reworks Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932) in order to demonstrate how the novel invites us to feel and think with the narrator:

> "I was far too small for it. I had no great conception of humanity. I would even, I believe, have more easily felt sorry for a dog dying than for Robinson, because a dog's not sly; whereas, whatever one may say, Léon was just a bit sly. I was sly too; we were all sly (p. 454). Yes, yes, we are all sly. What a pigsty we live in, after all. Who can blame poor Bardamu, and poor Céline, whose contempt for man, and for particular races of man, matches poor Bardamu's? This sordid world of ours has made them what they are, and Céline has expressed—and in such beautiful style and such an honest, impersonal manner, everything dramatized, no authorial intrusions—what we all know to be our real lost world. As Charles Berard says, "His reserves of compassion are limitless."
>
> And then we draw back. At least if we are lucky enough not to be entirely vulnerable to this kind of rhetoric, we draw back and repudiate what we have been told. (383)

Like the reviewer of "Novels and Novelists," Booth moves in and out of Céline's language, shifting the "I" to "we." Booth transforms a first-person narrator into the first-person plural to make the dangerous work of Céline's fiction evident. Moreover, what Booth has done here—in changing a dramatic "I" to a "we"—is the reverse of what he watches Poe do in the "progress" from setting a "get-

ready-to-shudder" mood in "The Premature Burial" (1844) to "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839): "By the simple expedient of creating a character who experiences the rhetoric in his own person, it has been made less objectionable. Every adjective and detail intended to set our mood is a part of the growing mood and experience of the central character; the rhetoric now seems functional, 'intrinsic.'" (202). Booth reveals that one way to create ironic distance may be to change the experience of one person to a shared experience, explicitly making the "story" reflect on shared values.

The reviews of the *London Quarterly Review* use summary and paraphrase, as opposed to exegesis, to decode the rhetoric of style and the "argument" of plot. The model of reading that emerges from them is based not so much on the reader's engagement with a fictional world as on the way the reader engages with the idea or message animating the text. This habit of understanding fiction as rhetoric shows how to engage with a novel's message through or despite its style. Matthew Arnold desired that the function of criticism should be "to understand and utter the best that is known and thought in the world": this claim frames the *Revue des deux-mondes* as "an organ for a free play of mind," as an alternative to other possible "organs" of ideas available to the Briton—the organ of the Tories, the Whigs, the Dissenters, the "common, satisfied, well-to-do Englishman" ("The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," 19). Though Arnold rejects the idea that criticism should adopt a sociopolitical and / or religious stance, its central task is still to engage as directly as possible with the ideas in the works under discussion.

To treat fictional texts as persuasive arguments is a deliberately reductive reading practice. The reviewing method of the *London Quarterly Review* depends, in part, on translating a story into the ideas it demonstrates. Thus, to read *Vanity Fair* and *Adam Bede* in these terms helps make sense of what it might have been like to read fiction within a culture that believed passionately in the moral efficacy of art. In the chapters that follow, I bring another form of distance to the texts under consideration by looking at the stylistic patterns, the goal being to make the texts I consider more "obviously" didactic. The payoff of Victorian evaluative criticism is, in part, its transformation of texts into the morals they inculcate. I use the recurrence of particular clausal structures across texts to argue that the reader is grammatically positioned vis-à-vis the situation in a way that establishes a specific perspective on character.

Like the *London Quarterly Review,* the next chapter considers Eliot with an eye to the effects of "insidious" moral commentary but reduces the problem in

a different way. I might oppose both approaches to a study of the commentary that considers its relation to broader questions of language and interpretation: J. Hillis Miller's recent work on figurative language in Eliot—how "characters get their thoughts entangled in metaphor"— in *Reading for Our Time: Adam Bede and Middlemarch Revisited* (2012). At an earlier stage of my work here, Miller observed that many of the commentative clauses I discuss deal in metaphor and yet noted that my focus on syntax seems to preclude attention to it. Indeed, there is something reductive about considering Eliot's great sentences—like the first sentence of *Middlemarch*—through the lens of the relative pronoun "which," but there is also something strikingly subtle about the view it gives of the moral perspective that infuses the text.

CHAPTER 3

Relative Clauses and the Narrative Present Tense in George Eliot

> Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress.
>
> GEORGE ELIOT, *MIDDLEMARCH*

The Commentative Clause

The first sentence of *Middlemarch* posits at once a character called Miss Brooke and a distinct type of beauty. It makes a claim about the story by referring to—and thereby creating—a concept from the world outside the story. This sentence shifts from the narrative past tense to a universalizing present by means of the relative pronoun "which." This odd grammatical construction is not an anomaly but recurs throughout *Middlemarch*—about 130 times, roughly as often as the suggestive word "possible." This clause form pulls together two major features of mid-nineteenth-century style that signal very different literary trends: the present-tense statement and the expansive modifying clause. Present-tense statements generalize fictional particulars, often in order to make a direct appeal to readerly sympathy; long modifying clauses elaborate on fictional particulars, signaling a realist mode of detailed, critical observation. Both features are particularly striking in George Eliot, and the sentences that bind them together reproduce, in miniature, key tensions embedded in the notion of a sympathetic realism. I call the "which" clause that shifts a sentence from past to present tense a commentative clause. This clause has little to do with the "all-knowing, all-understanding, and all-forgiving" mother

figure invoked by D. A. Miller in his description of Eliot's narrative voice (*Jane Austen; or, The Secret of Style*, 31). At the level of the clause, *Middlemarch* exhibits a pattern of sharp conceptual discrimination that is at odds with the larger trajectory toward sympathy that critics have long understood to shape its plot.[1]

By pairing the first glimpse of a major character with a conceptual reflection on the kind of beauty she has, *Middlemarch* models a process of seeing. The point of the first sentence is not simply to describe which kind of beauty Dorothea possesses but to integrate reflection into narrative presentation. Much contemporary criticism around the ethical work novels do considers reading as a relation between the reader and either the characters or narrator; I propose that there is also an ethics of syntax operating at the level of the clause. Instead of promoting specific values, these clauses inscribe a process of making judgments and aim to educate the reader in methods of assuming the perspective of other people.

The commentative clause in the first line of the novel imparts a generous amount of critical perception to the simple sentence "Miss Brooke had beauty." The cautious "seems" captures the meticulous quality of description in *Middlemarch* more generally; it throws a hint of uncertainty into what is already a claim limited to the relative perception of a certain kind of beauty. Nevertheless, Dorothea's beauty does seem to glow, distinct, against her background. On examining these clauses as a group, I found that while many of them were even more expansive than the novel's opening line, relatively few were as sympathetic. Elsewhere, the structure is more likely to delineate unflattering qualities or to branch out from free indirect discourse to invoke platitudes. Some of the grossest platitudes in *Middlemarch* are obliquely attributed to Dorothea's foil, Tertius Lydgate, as in this triple scoop of modifying clauses: "Lydgate felt sure that if ever he married, his wife would have that feminine radiance, that distinctive womanhood which must be classed with flowers and music, that sort of happy beauty which by its very nature was virtuous, being moulded only for pure and delicate joys" (164). This "sort of happy beauty" is a parody of Dorothea's, and the structural echo between the narrator's penetrating observation and the character's unreflective conventionality illustrates the difficulty of generalizing wisely in Eliot's texts. In many accounts of the novel, the key narrative arc is Dorothea's growing awareness of other people's pain; here, I focus on Lydgate's growing awareness of his wife's limitations.

My reading of the novel thus takes up the challenge to understand *Mid-*

dlemarch in terms of R. H. Hutton's 1872 review, which describes the novel as "not only a sketch of country life, connected by a story, but a running fire of criticism as well" (277). The first part of this chapter examines past-present hybrid sentences in *Middlemarch* and argues that the most valuable part of the "running fire" of criticism resides not in the keen observations it offers but in the way those observations are woven into the story. Rather than seeing the text as a third-person realist narrative, written in the past tense and occasionally disrupted by the figure of a sage speaking in the present tense, we should understand commentary as an essential element of the *Middlemarch* narrative texture.

The second part of this chapter considers how Eliot's essays and novels are shot through with generalizing statements about the importance of considering specific circumstances—maxims against maxims. I argue here that the commentative clause is Eliot's modern, novelized adaptation of the maxim. My consideration of a pattern of embedded maxims—relative clauses written in the present tense and relative clauses in free indirect discourse—leads me to the conclusion that Eliot imports to the novel an essayistic pattern of modifying key nouns. By using fictional circumstances to qualify generalizing claims, she creates highly specific and context-dependent maxims suited to the novel. Finally, I trace the commentative clause through the case of the character most closely associated with it: Tertius Lydgate. Its appearances in Lydgate's free indirect discourse suggest that this clause—and the mode of perception it embodies—both contributes to his growing understanding and signals the development of his character. Too often the scale of the Victorian novel makes it seem that plot is the only way to wrestle with its structure. Here, I argue that local-level reading for variations in recurring patterns can make central elements of the novel newly visible to us.

Present-tense generalizations in this novel are very often tempered by the use of a past-tense narrative statement. I know this because I have counted them, or at least those occurring in a survey of every third sentence in the novel (forty-four hundred sentences).[2] Tense is everything in the interpretation of fictional statements: Jonathan Culler calls it a "basic convention of literature" that all sentences not produced by characters are true; he follows Félix Martínez-Bonati in excepting the category of moral opinions, generalizations, and affirmations from this convention ("Omniscience," 27). Martínez-Bonati writes that "these affirmations . . . are not privileged, like the mimetic ones; they are the narrator's own opinions and ideas. . . . [There is] no need to give

them a feigned credence in order to experience the full sense of the narrative" (*Fictive Discourse and the Structures of Literature*, 32, 33). Such skepticism is problematic in reading a book like *Middlemarch*. To say that we need not accept the paradigmatic statements of Marian Evans Lewes is fair enough, but the narrator's opinions are central to the "full sense" of the narrative of *Middlemarch*, particularly insofar as the moral traits of the characters drive its plot.

In *Tempus: Besprochene und Erzählte Welt*, textual linguist Harald Weinrich offers an alternative to twentieth-century skepticism about the statements of a potentially unreliable narrator by linking narrative tense to generic discourse rather than fictional truth. For Weinrich, *tempus*, or tense, indicates the mode of discourse rather than the time of utterance.[3] My discussion follows his practice of using tense alone to define the difference between the "besprochene Welt," or "commented world," and the "erzählte Welt," or "narrated world." The dominant form of "commented world" writing is the persuasive essay. Since *Middlemarch* understands itself to do the work of the essay as well as of fiction, this is a useful way to approach its hybrid sentences.

Sentences that graft commentary onto narrative occur far more often in *Middlemarch* than readers had previously noticed. Appealing to the commentative clause in *Middlemarch* makes it possible to discuss style in it without relying solely on shared readerly impressions; for example, my commentative clause is R. H. Hutton's "running fire." I connect the intuitive effects texts have produced on readers to specific patterns in style. This process also makes it possible to trace structural rather than simply semantic patterns across texts and opens an avenue of attention to the form of the sentence.

The unit of the sentence is primarily a written phenomenon: Douglas Biber and his coauthors in the *Longman's Grammar of Spoken and Written English* prefer the term "independent clause" to "sentence" because "it is difficult to give a good linguistic definition of a sentence which applies equally well to writing and to spontaneous speech" (202).[4] Written, the sentence can (technically) be endlessly modified. As a subordinate clause, the commentative clause is more subtle than early-nineteenth-century declarative precepts; as a relative clause in a realist novel, it modifies nouns according to situationally specific traits. The commentative clause works in a number of ways, some of them flatly contradictory (parroting platitudes at one point and, at another, creating new complex ideas). The pattern sometimes establishes new truisms in earnest ("The Vicar's [frankness] seemed not of the repulsive sort that comes from an uneasy consciousness seeking to forestall the judgment of others, but simply

the relief of a desire to do with as little pretence as possible") and at other times invokes received ideas ironically ("[Lydgate] had not meant to look at [Rosamond] or speak to her with more than the inevitable amount of admiration and compliment which a man must give to a beautiful girl") (172, 166). In narrative commentary, its insight is sharp; in free indirect discourse, it indulges in cliché. The commentative clause combines the grammatical structure of a modifying clause with a narratological one by stitching together narrated story and discourse. The grammatical habit of modifying key nouns that brings these sentences together demonstrates how critical concepts might shape the ethical perception of others.

In his 1872 anthology *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse Selected from the Works of George Eliot*, Alexander Main labels his selections of first-person, present-tense declarations by poet and narrator as "George Eliot (*in propria persona*)." His conflation of narrator and author is a typical response to the long-standing interpretive problem presented by passages written in the first or second person and in the discursive present tense. It is suggestive for my argument because it blurs the distinction between fiction and nonfiction. It also gets at the heart of the problem of style: where does it come from, and whose style is it?

Style is often understood either as part of a larger linguistic phenomenon, measurable and subject to historical change, or as the distinctive imprint of an individual's language, marked by incident, training, habit, and personality. I consider Eliot's commentative clauses to reflect both an idiosyncrasy of style, developed in part through her early years as a reviewer, and a continual re-engagement with the tension between an impulse to generalize and an impulse to qualify generalizations. These clauses mark an encounter between a moralist and a storyteller.[5]

A Running Fire of Criticism

The tension between these roles is evident in R. H. Hutton's later review for the *Spectator* titled "George Eliot's Moral Anatomy," which describes the narrator's habit of expanding critically on character traits as "a speculative philosophy of character that always runs on in a parallel stream with her picture of character, sometimes adding to it an extraordinary fascination, sometimes seeming to distort it by a vein of needless and perhaps unjust suggestion. . . . One is conscious at times of taking part with her characters against the author, and of accusing her

of availing herself unfairly of the privilege of author, by adding a trait that bears out her own *criticism* rather than her own imaginative conception" (285–86).

Hutton's "parallel stream" of speculative philosophy, like the "running fire of criticism" in his earlier review, figures the relation between commentary and narrative in this text in a way that pits the author as creator of a fictional world against the author as moralist or arbiter of that world. Writing over halfway through the period of the serial publication of *Middlemarch*, Hutton finds himself tempted to take Rosamond's part; she is a favorite target of the commentative clause. My study is, in part, an examination of the mechanics of *Middlemarch*'s narrative effects on readers, and the commentative clauses about Rosamond seem to illustrate Hutton's argument. She "was clever with that sort of cleverness which catches every tone except the humorous"; she "was particularly forcible by means of that mild persistence which, as we know, enables a white soft living substance to make its way in spite of opposing rock"; and, most ominously, she "had that victorious obstinacy which never wastes its energy in impetuous resistance" (159, 345, 585).[6] Hutton's claim that such comments run on in a parallel stream with the presentation of character, for good or ill, captures an important characteristic of the commentative clause: it attracts attention in spite of its subordinate grammatical position. The claim about Rosamond's obstinacy might have been phrased, "There is a victorious obstinacy which never wastes its energy" or even, "That obstinacy is victorious which never wastes its energy." The subordinate structure emphasizes how this particular obstinacy is associated with a particular character in a particular situation. This is also true of Rosamond's "mild persistence," which is buried within a sentence that spends the majority of its words on Mr. Vincy. The passage explains why Rosamond will probably succeed in convincing her father to let her marry Lydgate:

> Apart from his dinners and his coursing, Mr. Vincy, blustering as he was, had as little of his own way as if he had been a prime minister: the force of circumstances was easily too much for him, as it is for most pleasure-loving florid men; and the circumstance called Rosamond was particularly forcible by means of that mild persistence which, as we know, enables a white soft living substance to make its way in spite of opposing rock. (345)

Although the mild persistence is described in a subordinate clause, as if it were merely a tangent, it remains the most memorable part of the sentence. This odd effect is typical of the commentative clause, which can branch off

from a major point and yet elaborate on a concept central to the novel's moral framework—here, the problem of Mr. Vincy's character and "the circumstance called Rosamond." The final comment about Rosamond as a "soft-living substance" represents the trait of "mild persistence" as an active process. The way in which character and circumstance are woven together in this passage links it to a major theme in Eliot's work: the conflict between character and destiny. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrative pauses:

> But you have known Maggie a long while, and need to be told, not her characteristics, but her history, which is a thing hardly to be predicted even from the completest knowledge of characteristics. For the tragedy of our lives is not created entirely from within. "Character," says Novalis, in one of his questionable aphorisms,—"character is destiny." But not the whole of our destiny. Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, was speculative and irresolute, and we have a great tragedy in consequence. But if his father had lived to a good old age, and his uncle had died an early death, we can conceive Hamlet's having married Ophelia, and got through life with a reputation of sanity, notwithstanding many soliloquies, and some moody sarcasms toward the fair daughter of Polonius, to say nothing of the frankest incivility to his father-in-law. (401–2)

This crack at Novalis's "questionable aphorism" reveals Eliot's skepticism toward pithy speech, just as "but not the whole of our destiny" exemplifies her own tendency to pithiness. This passage rewrites *Hamlet* in brief, from the German romantic reading of his (speculative and irresolute) character to his habits of speech in the play (soliloquies and sarcasms). In his review of *Middlemarch*, the nineteenth-century critic A. C. Dicey notes that the novel "might have been written to illustrate at once the truth of [Novalis's] dictum and of the criticism" of it (339). Mr. Vincy's daughter also illustrates both the truth of the dictum and the criticism in the novel's representation of her as a circumstance in her father's life and its analysis of his character: "Papa was not a rock: he had no other fixity than that fixity of alternating impulses sometimes called habit" (345). The commentative clause moves fluently between character trait and circumstance to suggest the interplay between character and destiny.[7]

Style and Circumstance

The fact that these carefully descriptive and darkly suggestive clauses are subordinate is one reason it is so difficult to make Eliot's analytical style visible

as style. Everyone agrees that Eliot's prose is analytical, but it remains unclear where in the prose the analysis lives. In his introduction to *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, David Carroll notes a pattern in overviews of Eliot's fiction at the time of her death that objected to "the philosopher clumsily tampering with the creations of the artist on the instructions of a preconceived theory" (38). Yet, as twentieth-century critics have observed, there are fewer narrative interruptions in Eliot's later novels. Carroll elsewhere suggests that "these moral comments are frequently short" and that "their intrusiveness decreases as George Eliot's career progresses and she becomes more confident and economical in creating a tone of voice which is both sympathetic and ironic, toward both characters and readers" ("George Eliot: The Sibyl of Mercia," 18). Barbara Hardy observes that "in the later novels in particular, there are many details which are not directly commented on but are left to the reader to supply" (*The Novels of George Eliot*, 13). On the shift away from a personified narrator (philosophical asides like chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*) W. J. Harvey notes that while Eliot's use of the historic present "irritates considerably in *Adam Bede*, there are only two or three brief instances in *The Mill on the Floss* and I cannot recall one single instance in *Middlemarch*" (*The Art of George Eliot*, 78). Susan S. Lanser breaks with this line of argument in *Fictions of Authority,* suggesting that moralizing moments in Eliot do not so much disappear as change shape: there is a shift from maxims rendered contingent by comments like "I believe" or "I think" to maxims embedded in narrative paragraphs. I take this a step further, pointing out that, especially in the later novels, maxims are rendered "contingent" by the very circumstances of the narrative in which they occur. Such embedded maxims fuse the narration of action and the ethical interpretation of action. The traits ascribed to the characters seem to follow from the narrative facts they describe, but they also influence the working of the story.

For example, Rosamond's victorious obstinacy describes her and shapes the development of the plot. In context, Rosamond successfully refuses to promise Lydgate not to go horseback riding with his cousin during her pregnancy; she goes horseback riding again and an accident leads to the loss of her pregnancy. The tendency of Rosamond's obstinacy to be "victorious" is as important to the development of the plot as her early rejection of Ned Plymdale. The commentative clause is not only contingent on a particular character but on the particular circumstances of that character at a given moment. In another instance, a commentative clause describing Rosamond is not only peculiar to her but is also defined against Dorothea. In the first meeting between the two characters, Dorothea

puts out her hand with her "usual simple kindness," and the narrator proceeds to draw a moral contrast between the two women:

> They were both tall, and their eyes were on a level; but imagine Rosamond's infantine blondness and wondrous crown of hair-plaits, with her pale-blue dress of a fit and fashion so perfect that no dressmaker could look at it without emotion, a large embroidered collar which it was to be hoped all beholders would know the price of, her small hands duly set off with rings, and that controlled self-consciousness of manner which is the expensive substitute for simplicity. (432–33)

The prose describing the "contrast" between the two figures is predominantly a satirical description of Rosamond.

By contrast, Dorothea's "simplicity" is so perfect that it is merely an attribute of the "simple kindness" that is manifested in the way she reaches out to Rosamond; Rosamond's "expensive substitute" requires its own gloss. The assertion of equal height, and a measure of evenness between the characters whose eyes are "on a level" shifts tone in an imperative to "imagine" a pile of satirical particulars that evoke, rather than describe (excepting the "wondrous crown" of braids and the blue dress), key elements of Rosamond's self-presentation, with an emphasis on the effects it is designed to have on others. The final clause, "that controlled self-consciousness of manner which is the expensive substitute for simplicity," changes the connotation of "expensive" from the cash value of Rosamond's collar and darkly hints at the novel's development through a commentative clause. In a sense, Dorothea's simplicity is here thrown into relief by rich dress. The essayist's habit of making highly specific, argumentative claims invests realist representation of detail with moral significance.

By changing tenses midstream from narrative past to commentative present, the commentative clause helps create the running fire of criticism that gives *Middlemarch* part of its distinctive style. *Middlemarch*, a novel deeply uncertain about the possibility of true empathy, is marked by a preference for explicit description over implicit knowledge. However, the commentative clause gives conflicting grammatical clues about whether it is presenting new knowledge or gesturing toward old knowledge because the distancing relative clause that describes context as if it were unfamiliar to the reader is often paired with a demonstrative "this" or "that," creating an opposing effect, as if the reader were already familiar with the thing described: "*that* —— which ——." Eliot's psychological and concrete details are extraordinarily precise because of the essayistic style in which they are presented.

The commentative clause is thus only rhetorically suggestive of shared experience, the element of Eliot's narrative voice emphasized by Isobel Armstrong, who argues that by "generalizing the unique experiences portrayed in her fictional world she enables the reader to enter into those experiences" ("'Middlemarch,'" 132). However, the very length of these expressions attests to the deliberate construction of "fellow feeling." The reader's relationship to the experience of the characters is unstable and uncertain, as suggested by the following, for instance: "Will Ladislaw was in one of those tangled crises which are commoner in experience than one might imagine, from the shallow absoluteness of men's judgments" (802). This sentence both invites recognition of "one of those tangled crises" and corrects what you think you recognize by pointing out that such things are "commoner in experience than one might imagine." The clause introduces a concept in the guise of merely pointing to one. The shift from the particular character, in this case Will Ladislaw, to a general circumstance "one of those tangled crises" is also a shift to a more precise description of this circumstance. A sentence moving between a fictional particular and a generalization models a mode of reasoning in which it is possible to move back and forth between the general and the particular. The tense of such clauses is the present, yet the purpose of the commentary is to elaborate on the situation rather than synthesize or package it.

Unlike the maxim that stands alone, the relative clause that articulates specific circumstances allows for a technically limitless modification of the referent. How much of "fellow feeling" is the dogged attempt to preserve an objective perspective on someone else's experience? How many words on a page does it take to describe and then to begin to understand that experience? Under what circumstances is an idea like beauty modified by careful attention to the case at hand, and when is it modified by cliché into a type having dangerously little to do with that case? These questions are prompted by the language of commentative clauses, which is not only complex but often also tortuous.

The habit of thought the commentative clause models is not simply that of imagining oneself in someone else's shoes but of drawing sharp distinctions among ideas. Commentative clauses in *Middlemarch* are realized through a highly specific set of textual circumstances, and they are *long*. At one moment in chapter 65, Lydgate feels not only helplessness but "that half-maddening sense of helplessness which comes over passionate people when their passion is met by an innocent-looking silence whose meek victimized air seems to put them in the wrong, and at last infects even the justest indignation with a doubt

of its justice" (665). In her 2005 essay on Eliot, Catherine Gallagher considers passages that, like the ones I've cited, move between a fictional instance and a highly particularized generalization. Gallagher suggests that this "unusual category," a "class constructed just to accommodate random exceptions," might "easily be read as a skeptical commentary on classification" ("George Eliot," 64).[8] Indeed.

Against the "tiny number of inconceivably coarse axes of categorization [that] have been painstakingly inscribed in current critical and political thought" (namely, "gender, race, class, nationality, sexual orientation"), Eve Sedgwick sets the

> rich, unsystematic resources of nonce taxonomy for mapping out the possibilities, dangers, and stimulations of their human social landscape. It is probably people with the experience of oppression or subordination who have most *need* to know it; and I take the precious, devalued arts of gossip, immemorially associated in European thought with servants, with effeminate and gay men, with all women, to have to do not even so much with the transmission of necessary news as with the refinement of necessary skills for making, testing, and using unrationalized and provisional hypotheses about what *kinds of people* there are to be found in one's world. The writing of a Proust or a James would be exemplary here: projects precisely of *nonce* taxonomy, of the making and unmaking and *re*making and dissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings concerning all the kinds it may take to make up a world. (*Epistemology of the Closet*, 22–23)

I would argue that Eliot's skepticism about classification prompts a moment of generic resourcefulness in which Eliot draws on the power of the modifying clause to bring concepts as close as possible to experience. In its resolute focus on delineating the peculiar conditions of human experience, the commentative clause does not register optimism about the moral power of fiction so much as a deep pessimism about how much people can ever know about each other's experience. The multiplication of modifying clauses suggest that attempts to understand the experience of other people are at best asymptotic, approaching full understanding but never attaining it.

Maxims against Maxims

Eliot's commentative clauses are a form of novelized maxim that stem from her philosophical investment in the importance of qualified claims: they are a

specific site in which tensions in her moral theory of art are registered in prose. The paradox of moral commentary in Eliot is that her prose is stylistically marked by aphorisms and semantically characterized by attacks on conventional wisdom. The maxim against the use of maxims also figures largely in accounts of moralizing in Eliot by Lanser and Leah Price, but both understand it to be Eliot's response to fluctuations in her cultural authority.[9] In the well-known maxim against maxims commenting on the character Nicholas Bulstrode, however, it becomes clear that its literary style reflects a powerful narratorial claim to a moral authority circumscribed by its own watchful fastidiousness: "There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men" (619). Just as the power of direct fellow feeling checks the pernicious effects of general doctrine, the first, sweeping pronouncement ("There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality") is "checked" by the clause that follows ("the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men"). The very complexity of this maxim, in its many adjectival qualifications (*general* doctrine, *deep-seated* habit, *direct* fellow-feeling, *individual* fellow men) and its piling on of negatives (*no* doctrine, *not* capable, if *un*-checked), suggests not a faith in some power of "direct fellow-feeling" so much as the essayist's reliance on complex syntax in order to communicate ideas. The admonitory maxim is both authorized and undercut by its scrupulous, halting style.

Eliot's first major experiment with creating novelistic maxims by adding qualifications and embedding them in the context of a story occurs in a narrative aside from *The Mill on the Floss*. The best-known maxim against maxims sounds like a summary sentence and is often quoted simply as "All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the man of maxims," although this represents slightly less than a quarter of the total words in its sentence. A maxim is the kind of proposition that might begin with the words "All people," yet what begins as an unqualified claim is immediately circumscribed to include only "people of broad, strong sense"—a statement that invites the reader to identify without actually including himself or herself. This claim is made—and should be understood—in the context of a discussion of casuistry. According to the *OED*, a casuist is someone who "studies and resolves cases of conscience or doubtful questions regarding duty and conduct"; casuistry is "that part of Ethics which resolves cases of conscience, applying the general rules of religion and morality to particular instances in which 'circumstances

alter cases,' or in which there appears to be a conflict of duties. Often (and perhaps originally) applied to a quibbling or evasive way of dealing with difficult cases of duty; sophistry." The following passage situates the maxim in its context, as merely part of a longer statement.

> The great problem of the shifting relation between passion and duty is clear to no man who is capable of apprehending it: the question, whether the moment has come in which a man has fallen below the possibility of a renunciation that will carry any efficacy, and must accept the sway of a passion against which he had struggled as a trespass, is one for which we have no master-key that will fit all cases. The casuists have become a byword of reproach; but their perverted spirit of minute discrimination was the shadow of a truth to which eyes and hearts are too often fatally sealed,—the truth, that moral judgments must remain false and hollow, unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot.
>
> All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims, because such people discern early that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy. (497)

The structure of this passage mirrors its content: moral judgments must be false and hollow *unless* they are perpetually checked against the circumstances of the case. Even the assertion about moral judgments has an "unless," a condition that would make it false—that it is possible to have true and sound moral judgments if there could be perpetual reference to circumstances. The "unless" turns moral judgment into an ongoing process.

The theory of moral judgment as a dialectical process of empirical observation and abstract conceptualization is realized here at the level of the sentence by subordinate clause modifications. Thanks to its capacity to accrete subordinate clauses, the English sentence can grow longer and become more precise at the same time. It thus allows for a good deal of "checking" (which recalls the passage about Bulstrode) and "enlightening." This embeddedness is a feature of Eliot's style in spite of the quotable quality that Price notices in her moralizing—a "lapidary," "quotable," and "sententious" element (*The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel,* 133,105,132). As an instance of how Eliot's maxims against maxims are marked by "their own axiomatic self-containment," Price cites as a single quotation, like Main, both paragraphs from *The Mill on the*

Floss (133). To make of this long meditation something that can be described as self-contained, both sentences must be edited and the two paragraphs sewn together. The relative clause in this passage illustrates an important aspect of the ethical work the commentative clause does in *Middlemarch*, which is to interpret a fictional dilemma rather than presenting a clear answer to it: "The question, whether the moment has come in which a man has fallen below the possibility of a renunciation that will carry any efficacy, and must accept the sway of a passion against which he had struggled as a trespass, is one for which we have no master-key that will fit all cases" (497). This "question" redescribes the fictional situation in terms of a quite specific moral dilemma, which is at this moment not Maggie's but Dr. Kenn's to solve. Dr. Kenn's consideration of Maggie's case in an unquoted monologue gives way to a restatement of the problem in general terms—yet the conceptual conflict is much more precisely described. The mazy problem Maggie faces is reformulated as a question of at what point passion can no longer be renounced but instead becomes duty. The abstract formulation of Dr. Kenn's dilemma enables the reapplication of this way of framing a problem to other parts of the novel. (For instance, it becomes possible to reinterpret the crisis of Tom's discovery of Maggie's meetings with Philip in terms of the moment when her longing for outside contact generates an obligation toward Philip that conflicts with her familial obligation.) The phrasing of the question (*whether* the moment has come) implicitly asserts that a moment does come at which passion becomes a duty. The shift away from Maggie's specific circumstances (when a *man* has fallen below the point of meaningful renunciation) results paradoxically in a precise description of her moral circumstances by defining the problem of marriage to Stephen Guest in abstract terms. The "key" provided by this shift to the general is primarily interpretive, not judgmental—it reveals not how Maggie should act but only what, exactly, her problem is. It provides a prescriptive formula for framing moral judgments that prefigures Eliot's use of the commentative mode to clarify key moral problems of the novel.

This passage touches on the third major strand of maxim making in Eliot: its complex relationship to the representation of character consciousness. The discussion of casuistry here grows out of Dr. Kenn's consideration of how to advise Maggie and comes at the end of a passage written in what Dorrit Cohn calls "psycho-narration," or present-tense narrative commentary that provides interpretive commentary on reported thought (*Transparent Minds,* 24). The interpretive commentary here describes Dr. Kenn as a "man who

had known spiritual conflict, and lived through years of devoted service to his fellow-men"—in other words, as a very good authority. As he considers "the possible issue either of an endeavour to restore the former relations with Lucy and Philip, or of counselling submission to this irruption of a new feeling" (497), the narrative shifts to the present tense and undercuts his ability to make the right decision by asserting the gravity of the moral problem he faces. Is this description of "the moment" attributable to Dr. Kenn, or has it become the voice of the narrator itself?

The commentative clause tends to overtake the kinetic energy of a sentence, and it is not always clear where one has ended up. Commentative clauses are often associated with free indirect discourse, as in the ironic description of Lydgate's future wife, Rosamond. Elsewhere, they seem rather to break with free indirect discourse, or at least to change its register in relation to the narrator's discourse. For example, a sentence that begins with an ironic description of Edward Casaubon's perception of Dorothea Brooke suddenly seems to validate that perception: "He had formerly observed with approbation her capacity for worshipping the right object; he now foresaw with sudden terror that this capacity might be replaced by presumption, this worship by the most exasperating of all criticism,—that which sees vaguely a great many fine ends and has not the least notion what it costs to reach them" (200). When the sentence changes tenses, it changes sides. At each "which" clause, a sentence can branch into a new register as well as a new semantic direction.

Because each branch of a sentence gives a kind of gloss on the head noun or modified idea, these commentative clauses are well suited to the ironic parroting of conventional wisdom. This pattern is especially important to characterization and frequently occurs in free indirect discourse. The structure suited to making highly particularized experiences or traits more available to a reader also lends itself, particularly through free indirect discourse, to the unthinking rehearsal of platitudes. We should add to the comparison of "Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress" to "that feminine radiance, that distinctive womanhood," and so forth, a third example: Lydgate's French lover, Laure, is described as "a Provençale, with dark eyes, a Greek profile, and rounded majestic form, having that sort of beauty which carries a sweet matronliness even in youth, and her voice was a soft cooing" (151). These campy versions of the novel's opening use relative clauses to expound on an ideal of "feminine radiance" and a "matronly" beauty in counterpoint to the relatively simple claim about the distinctiveness of Dorothea's

beauty. Laure's beauty, in particular, becomes fully a goddess type: "Since he had had the memory of Laure, Lydgate had lost all taste for large-eyed silence: the divine cow no longer attracted him, and Rosamond was her very opposite" (*M*, 159). The commentative clause describing Laure's beauty enacts a mode of judgment in which preconceived concepts take the place of critical thinking—nouns are modified by received ideas instead of careful observation.

Reading with Brain

The spectrum between the poles of received wisdom and wise observation is articulated by the representation of Lydgate's free indirect discourse across the novel through another use of relative clauses. Henry James's review of *Middlemarch* is also interested in Hutton's "running fire of criticism": "The constant presence of thought, of generalizing instinct, of *brain*, in a word, behind her observation, gives the latter its great value and her whole manner its high superiority" (490). The "brain" behind the observation that James describes in Eliot's manner is analogous to the mode of representation that I have been describing.[10] The best "realist" representation in *Middlemarch* is evoked not simply by the portrayal of everyday detail, or even by careful psychological portraiture, but by the "generalizing instinct" that treats such detail. With this emphasis, James finds that "the most perfectly successful passages in the book are perhaps those painful fireside scenes between Lydgate and his miserable little wife" (489). I agree, and it is in those passages that commentative clauses tend to cluster.

In my survey of commentative clauses in *Middlemarch*, 42 percent (eighteen) appear either in Lydgate's free indirect discourse or in descriptions of his qualities or circumstances.[11] Of these, the majority (thirteen of eighteen, which makes almost a third of all commentative clauses in the survey) are divided among the three sections that describe the beginning of his courtship of Rosamond, the couple's first conversation about debt, and the fight over Rosamond's secret letter to Sir Godwin. In these scenes, Lydgate develops Eliot-like "brain," to his cost, he simply begins to qualify his ideas about Rosamond based on his observations of her rather than his assumptions about her. The sentences that mark this progress are in free indirect discourse and are written entirely in the past tense. That is, this element of character representation is not accomplished by commentative clauses but by elaborate relative clauses that do similar work.

The key fireside scene in chapter 58 of book 6 presents Lydgate telling Rosamond about their debt and portrays his increasing understanding of Rosamond's inner life. It foregrounds the problem of legibility in its epigraph, eight lines from the middle of Shakespeare's Sonnet 93. The sonnet is a meditation on falsely intelligible beauty that opens, "So shall I live, supposing thou art true / Like a deceived husband," while the omitted final lines read "how like Eve's apple doth thy beauty grow, / If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show." Like the access to Rosamond's inner life provided by the narrator, the last two lines of the sonnet are a context available to the reader. Lydgate must learn to read Rosamond on his own. This chapter is a meditation on beauty's failure to signify goodness; it is here that Rosamond's beautiful form finally prompts Lydgate to question the identity of beauty with a Patmorean ideal of goodness: "For the moment he lost the sense of his wound in a sudden speculation about this new form of feminine impassibility revealing itself in the sylph-like frame which he had once interpreted as the sign of a ready intelligent sensitiveness" (592). The problem of this new *form* of feminine impassibility abstracts the shape of Rosamond's body into the suddenly more urgent form of a concept.

In this scene, Lydgate gains ground in distinguishing physical form from his idea about it—and one idea from one another. The gap narrows between Lydgate's shallow, free indirect discourse and a more carefully generalizing mode that considers the hard, particular fact of Rosamond herself. Early in the novel, the narrator attributes to Rosamond "that sort of cleverness which catches every tone except the humorous," but only here does Lydgate begin to understand her "cleverness" (159). "He had regarded Rosamond's cleverness as precisely of the receptive kind which became a woman. He was now beginning to find out what that cleverness was—what was the shape into which it had run as into a close network aloof and independent" (586). This line pits an old concept against a new, suggesting Lydgate's better ability to observe Rosamond, with brain. His definition of "cleverness" is only structurally similar to the narrator's; the two are quite distinct in terms of tone and even content. But the structure matters: Lydgate no longer shifts to a generalization to return to received ideas but to gain some objective purchase on his own experience that enables him to judge his wife better. What Lydgate attains is not sympathy for his wife's horrible littleness but the vivid apprehension of its contours.

In the early representation of Lydgate, the commentative clause invokes platitudes. The syntactic shape of Rosamond's consciousness is differently ironic and illuminates by contrast the way commentative clauses work: she uses a

kind of crude shorthand. When Lydgate arrives at home to find Rosamond and Will seated by the fire, Rosamond can already tell that "her husband was in a 'horrible humour' " (591). The use of internal quotation marks to separate a character's thought from the narrative is rare in *Middlemarch*. Instead of subtly incorporating Rosamond's perspective into the narrative, her thoughts are marked as distinct in a kind of open mimicry. In another instance, her inadequate reading of Lydgate is subsequently glossed by the narrator: "Lydgate, relieved from anxiety about her, relapsed into what she inwardly called his moodiness—a name which to her covered his thoughtful preoccupation with other subjects than herself, as well as that uneasy look of the brow and distaste for all ordinary things as if they were mixed with bitter herbs, which really made a sort of weather-glass to his vexation and foreboding" (586–87). If the commentative clause shifts to the generalizing present in order to take in the full scope of the circumstances of a quality or concept, Rosamond's private shorthand is the language of egoism. She notices Lydgate's "vexation and foreboding" but cannot conceptualize it beyond its immediate effect on herself.[12] Despite the moment when Rosamond's sympathetic intervention helps to bring Dorothea and Will together, her character remains the story's premier case of egotism.[13] The language of her observations is the antitype of the commentative clause.

If Rosamond is a counterexample to Lydgate, an analogous one may be found in the syntactic connection between the commentative clause and Honoré de Balzac's "un de ces." To borrow Dorrit Cohn's example of how narrator-oriented novels work, Balzac's generalizations spread outward like rings from the idea of Rastignac's dreams in *Le père Goriot* (1835):

> The next day Rastignac dressed himself very elegantly, and at about three o'clock in the afternoon went to call on Mme de Restaud, indulging on the way in *those dizzily foolish dreams which fill the lives of young men with so much excitement: they then take no account of obstacles nor of dangers, they see success in everything, poeticize their existence simply by the play of their imagination, and render themselves unhappy or sad by the collapse of projects that had as yet no existence save in their heated fancy; if they were not ignorant and timid, the social world would not be possible*. Eugène walked with extreme caution in order not to get muddy. (*Transparent Minds*, 24, her translation, my emphasis)

As Cohn notes, the change in tense and the change in subject ("from the specific Rastignac to the species 'young men' " [24]) allows Balzac to shift from the

particular to the general/evaluative mode (24). The final generalization has even larger reach, encompassing the "social world." The sentence is technically a commentative clause. In Balzac, as in Eliot, the generalization is structurally subordinate to the part of the sentence that tells "what happened," yet overwhelms it: about four-fifths of the total words come from that initial modification of "dreams." "Un de ces," or "one of those," is the exemplary structure of Roland Barthes's "gnomic" code in *S/Z*. This is the code which refers the reader outward to the unwritten volumes of received knowledge, in which live what Eliot called in a letter to Cara Bray in 1873 the "crammed notions of what ought to have been felt" that stand in for critical self-reflection (*The George Eliot Letters*, 1:471). But how do we distinguish between a reference to an unwritten cultural code and a challenge to that code? In Barthesian terms, when does the gnomic code become ironized?[14]

In Eliot, the satirical clauses tend to sound like Balzac. His generalizing tendency finds its closest analogue in Lydgate's first impression of Dorothea. He thinks, "She is a good creature—that fine girl—but a little too earnest. . . . It is troublesome to talk to such women. They are always wanting reasons, yet they are too ignorant to understand the merits of any question, and usually fall back on their moral sense to settle things after their own taste" (93). Lydgate's present-tense generalizations about "such women," with his uncompromising "always," are distinctly Balzacian. Commentative clauses that occur in the narration of *Middlemarch*, however, are also what we might call *semantically* subordinate to the narrative portion of the sentence. That is, instead of using the fictional world as a platform to make broader generalizations, Eliot's subordinate clauses tend to zoom inward to make the major idea of the sentence more precise. Balzac moves from dreams, to the social world, and back to the mud; in Eliot, the range of images and details tend to speak less to the world outside the novel than to the extravagantly particular concepts that govern it. Eliot's narrative sentence combines wide observation with narrow views.[15]

How do such narrow generalizations feed back into the problem of sympathy and critique in the novel and in Eliot's work more largely? Lydgate's reward for his lost illusions is a fully apprehended Rosamond, while Dorothea's illusions are replaced by deep sympathy. Yet Dorothea's marriage is also, after all, one long, bitter revelation of Casaubon's pettiness. The emergence from moral stupidity is, for Dorothea, an extremely painful process. After seeing what she takes to be evidence of an understanding between Rosamond and Will Ladislaw, Dorothea faces the consequences of moral intelligence:

> All the active thought with which she had before been representing to herself the trials of Lydgate's lot, and this young marriage union which, like her own, seemed to have its hidden as well as evident troubles—all this vivid sympathetic experience returned to her now as a power: it asserted itself as acquired knowledge asserts itself and will not let us see as we saw in the day of our ignorance. (788)[16]

The final emphasis of the passage is on the consequences of "vivid sympathetic experience," but the comparison with the more objective "acquired knowledge" suggests instead the stream of discerning observations supplied by critical narrative commentary. That is, the best way to understand sympathetic experience is by reflecting on acquired knowledge. Dorothea is no longer *allowed* to see as she saw in the "day of [her] ignorance": she is forced to see things in the light not only of what she "feels" but what she now "knows" to be true.

Gaining positive knowledge of the pettiness of others might be the mark of moral growth in Eliot, but such knowledge provokes a caustic, acerbic, antipathetic response as well as a more sympathetic one. Here, I am thinking not only of Maggie and Tom in *The Mill on the Floss*, in which the narrator grimly instructs those "inclined to be severe" on Tom to "remember that the responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision" (500) but of Dorothea's initial burst of anger toward Will after she finds him with Rosamond: "Why had he not stayed among the crowd of whom she asked nothing—but only prayed that they might be less contemptible?" (587). Rosemarie Bodenheimer names, almost in passing, the key contradiction in *Middlemarch* between "the defense of commonness and the defense of the specially gifted character" (*Real Life*, 55). She is right: the specially gifted character with the discriminating ethical perspective is, in many ways, at the mercy of the "crowd"—forced to sympathize with commonness in spite of its limitations. Again, a major philosophical problem in *Middlemarch* is how to see others clearly but without contempt: the many facets of this problem and the partial solutions to it that *Middlemarch* proposes are most clearly seen not in its plot but at the level of the sentence—not in the "wisdom" of narratorial commentary as such but in its recurrent patterns of structure.

Let us consider the running commentary of the commentative clause in the context of our understanding of ethics in George Eliot more generally. Both Garrett Stewart and Elizabeth Ermarth argue in their work on figured narrators that narrative commentary offers itself as a model for the reader;

the second person and first-person singular / plural modes of address, they suggest, break with the narrative to call attention to the rhetorical situation of the narrator. Stewart argues that the interrupting narrator interpellates the reader into the process of making meaning from the text. Ermarth uses scenes of reading within the novels to show how an engaging narrator models the appropriate readerly response within the story. Both Stewart and Ermarth focus on the narrative persona in their consideration of the commentary, which leads them to regard the narrator as a guide for the reader. My focus on aggregated, disconnected subordinate clauses reveals the relative diffusion of interpretive commentary and its lack of internal coherence and so produces a different conclusion about the narrator—the subordinated relative clause in the past-present hybrid structure dampens a potential narratorial "voice" instead of amplifying it. If we consider narrative commentary as a shift in tense rather than person, we find many moments that do *not* break with narrative illusion to call attention to the rhetorical situation or raise the question of who is telling the story and why. Rather, they reveal the extent to which Eliot's moralizing moments are not "interruptions" of the story but key elements of the unfolding fiction. The strategy of moralizing embodied by the commentative clause is one that seeks rather to evade responsibility for the harsh judgments it passes than to call attention to its exemplary capacity to sympathize.

The other important strain in recent criticism bears on the complexity of the commentative clause and its alienating effect. Insofar as it continually redefines key ideas, the commentative clause is an excellent example of Dorothy Hale's notion of "fiction as restriction." Hale finds that a wide range of recent ethical criticism comes down not to the idea of free subjectivity but to "a sociality felt as self-restraint": "For the new ethicist, literature does not technically teach us anything at all, unless we understand learning as the overthrow of epistemology by experience, the troubling of certainty by an apprehension that comes through surprised feeling" ("Aesthetics and the New Ethics," 902, 903). The "troubling of certainty" speaks to the problem from Eliot's letter: that "infinite stupidity of readers who are always substituting their crammed notions of what ought to have been felt for any attempt to recall truly what they themselves have felt under like circumstances" (*The George Eliot Letters*, 5:471). This is why commentative clauses might satirize platitudes and challenge "crammed notions" by creating new, expansive notions. Hale captures the element of the commentative clause that presents a stylistic solution to the ethical problem

of received ideas. Following Butler, she quotes Adorno's "Morality and Style" from *Minima Moralia*, which in its emphasis on rigorous formulation is surprisingly close kin to Eliot's notion of realism: "Vague expression permits the hearer to imagine whatever suits him and what he already thinks in any case. Rigorous formulation demands unequivocal comprehension, conceptual effort, to which people are deliberately discouraged, and imposes on them in advance of any content a suspension of all received opinions, and thus an isolation, that they violently resist" (101). *Minima Moralia* is worth keeping in mind as we turn from Eliot's fiction to her essays, early and late. Adorno's brief pieces are epigrammatic yet complex, even self-contradictory.[17] Given the unbreachable difference of historical situation, I find it uncanny that Adorno and Eliot both attribute the poverty of intellect of an age to its poverty of language and respond to this larger cultural problem by developing individual styles that embed unforgettable epigrams in meticulously complex discussions. For Eliot, the full expression of style as cultural critique happens only when she turns away from the novel because that also means turning away from the novelist's pattern of creating sympathetic characters to illustrate newly complex ideas.

Critical discernment is a major theme in Eliot's early critical essays on realism and relative clauses a key element of their style. The essays, like the later novels, use relative clauses to create a syntactic spectrum between carefully delineated observations and the compressed shorthand of received ideas. In her review of Riehl's *Natural History of German Life*, Eliot argues that representation should strive for more objective purchase on reality, an objective purchase like that which she claims to find in Riehl's work. The essay's grammar is loaded with modifying relative clauses because the kind of realism Eliot argues for depends on delineating adequate concepts rather than concrete details. Eliot argues that a reader of the *Westminster Review* cannot accurately imagine haymaking because that reader cannot imagine the haymakers—whom the essay portrays as scarcely human in their inability to think abstractly: "Observe a company of haymakers. When you see them at a distance, tossing up the forkfuls of hay in the golden light . . . and the bright green space which tells of work done gets larger and larger, you pronounce the scene 'smiling'" (296). However, she continues, "Approach nearer, and you will certainly find that haymaking time is a time for joking, . . . but the coarse laugh that bursts out every now and then, and expresses the triumphant taunt, is as far as possible from your conception of idyllic merriment. That delicious effervescence of the mind which we call fun, has no equivalent for the northern peasant, except

tipsy revelry; the only realm of fancy and imagination for the English clown exists at the bottom of the third quart pot" (269).

The argument depicts alternatives to "your conception" of "idyllic merriment" and "fun." This passage does not so much describe haymaking as peasants, and not really so much peasants as a mode of concretized thought that the essayist finds contemptible. Yet insofar as the "English clown" has no "fancy or imagination," he is a figure for the reader who ignorantly describes the scene as "smiling." The essay provides corrective concepts based on close observations. Eliot ignores the physical details of haymaking—she is not interested in blisters or in air thick with hay—in favor of psychological ones. Even the ostensibly physical description of "the bright green space" is modified by the (retrospectively) pompous qualification that it "tells of work done." The ironic effect of the essayist's alternatives to the reader's notions later in the passage is partly due to a change in length as well as register—from the expansive predefinition of "idyllic merriment" as a coarse laugh that expresses a triumphant taunt in the first sentence to the compressed notion of "tipsy revelry" that stands in for "that delicious effervescence of the mind which we call fun" in the second—and has much to do with the resolutely alienating sentiments expressed by the rephrased ideas. Here, a critical habit of mind that demands clear-eyed psychological detail repeatedly finds expression in a grammatical structure designed to modify ideas.

Moral Swindlers

The emphasis on conceptual precision in Eliot's essays should alert us to the importance of the role of detailed claims—as opposed to concrete details—in realist representation. In the Riehl essay, the "details" described in the present tense are moral and psychological rather than physical. The conceptual structure of *Middlemarch* is entwined with its action through the commentative clause, which creates space for modifying a character's motivation, experience, and feeling. The development of the characters as individuals, as Hutton complains, seems to be subordinate to the description of their moral characteristics. It is as if the narrative *escapes* from the past tense, with its frustrating illimitability of interpretation, into the present-tense commented world, in which concepts can be isolated and defined. The essays of Eliot's *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, represented as a book of fictional essays by a scholar named Theophrastus Such, allow conceptual development to flourish in its

own right. For example, in the essay titled "Moral Swindlers," the fictional Such argues that

> it is of little use to theorise in ethics while our habitual phraseology stamps the larger part of our social duties as something that lies aloof from the deepest needs and affections of our nature. The informal definitions of popular language are the only medium through which theory really affects the mass of minds even among the nominally educated; and when a man whose business hours, the solid part of every day, are spent in an unscrupulous course of public or private action which has every calculable chance of causing widespread injury and misery, can be called moral because he comes home to dine with his wife and children and cherishes the happiness of his own hearth, the augury is not good for the use of high ethical and theological disputation. (51)

The fictional world has hardly any precision at all: the man who "comes home to dine with his wife and children and cherishes the happiness of his own hearth" evoked here is ostentatiously generalized. Instead of weaving this reflection into a story that would have given it contour or detail, this passage gestures toward a figure in the service of its larger argument that the concept of morality must include civic duty and business ethics. "Moral Swindlers" works like a commentative clause modifying a received idea of morality, and that it does so reveals in turn the degree to which commentative clauses work more like tiny essays than like long fictional sentences. In fiction, the commentative clause tends to seem a little too big for its situation, but in the essay, the focus is on conceptual development, which is only supplemented by a rough sketch of a particular example.

In prioritizing the elaboration of ideas over the representation of human figures, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* illuminates the connection in Eliot's work more generally between complex notions and caricature, in which personal characteristics are clarified at the expense of the person described. The classical source for the book is a collection of caricatures, each a portrait of an embodied trait. Eliot's text includes pieces critiquing Victorian intellectual life ("How We Encourage Research," "How We Come to Give Ourselves False Testimonials, and Believe in Them"), but the key essays either treat modern morals in themselves ("Debasing the Moral Currency") or provide cautionary caricature sketches ("A Man Surprised at His Originality," "The Watch-dog of Knowledge" and "The Too Ready Writer"). The caricature sketches are most closely related to the original, Theophrastus's *Characters*, which is made up

of brief sketches of figures embodying certain qualities ("The Unseasonable Man," "The Unpleasant Man") in which the characteristic is defined and then elaborated upon ("Unseasonableness consists in a chance meeting disagreeable to those who meet" [107]).[18] Abstract ideas are still illustrated by example, but here the examples proliferate with no regard for detail. The unseasonable man is presented in terms of what the he *will* do, or is apt to do, in a range of situations: "The Unseasonable man is one who will go up to a busy person, and open his heart to him. He will serenade his mistress when she has a fever. He will address himself to a man who has been cast in a surety-suit, and request him to become his security. He will come to give evidence when the trial is over" (107). Here, situations succeed one another as impressions; the passage luxuriates in illustrating a type. The unseasonable man is nothing more nor less than the sum of all possible ways to have bad timing.

Impressions of Theophrastus Such is an experiment in a nineteenth-century version of neoclassical satire that grows out of the abstracting strain inherent to Eliot's realism. It is continuous with the impulse toward abstraction that had always been a key element of realist representation. The persona of Theophrastus Such is a kind of limit case of how one might make precise moral distinctions while escaping the imperative to sympathize with characters that structures Eliot's novels. The stance of the satirical essayist critiquing a late-Victorian culture of letters is, however, importantly distinct from that of eighteenth-century writers. In the opening essay, "Looking Inward," Such reimagines the position of the spectator figure of the eighteenth century:

> Thus if I laugh at you, O fellow-men! if I trace with curious interest your labyrinthine self-delusions, . . . it is not that I feel myself aloof from you: the more intimately I seem to discern your weaknesses, the stronger to me is the proof that I share them. How otherwise could I get the discernment?—for even what we are averse to, what we vow not to entertain, must have shaped or shadowed itself within us as a possibility before we can think of exorcising it. No man can know his brother simply as a spectator. Dear blunderers, I am one of you. (4)

The argument in support of moral satire—that it takes one to know one—asserts a fraternity of fellow sinners but reveals the tension we saw in the commentative clause in which the weakness, and the discernment, is at once shared and not shared. The passage creates a dual relationship with the reader through the inclusive "we" and the ambiguously plural "you." To see the ambivalence about common experience registered in this passage, it is hardly necessary to

recall the closing of "Au lecteur" in *Les fleurs du mal*: "*—Hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable,—mon frère*!" Cultural critique is here, as in Baudelaire, inseparable from self-critique; that "we" marks Eliot's Victorian neoclassicism as more self-reflective than eighteenth-century satire. In the passage from "Looking Inward," the shift from "I" and "you" to "we" marks a partial or fluctuating identification with the reader: the shift after the "I" has discerned "your" weaknesses to the statement that *we* are averse to certain things includes the reader as a critic of human nature. The proportion of criticism to sympathetic commentary is inverted: the light current of critical commentary running through the novels has become a current of sympathetic identification running through the more openly satirical essays. In Henry Fielding's description of satirical didacticism in *Joseph Andrews*, the satirist aims "not to expose one pitiful wretch to the small and contemptible circle of his acquaintance; but to hold the glass to thousands in their closets, that they may contemplate their deformity, and thus by suffering private mortification may avoid public shame" (203). *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* argues that each individual can satirize himself: "That a gratified sense of superiority is at the root of barbarous laughter may be at least half the truth. But there is a loving laughter in which the only recognised superiority is that of the ideal self, the God within, holding the mirror and the scourge for our own pettiness as well as our neighbours" (13). The notion that satire is self-directed can be an apology for writing satire without sympathy. The problem of representation in *Middlemarch* is the failure of sympathetic identification in the face of extremely precise detail. The turn to the essay enables a turn in the commentative position from the central idea that weakness leads to suffering to the idea that weakness leads to pettiness. The very consonance between them reveals the double role that scrupulous moral discernment has always played in sympathy. The persona of Theophrastus Such, whose generalizations are located in a fictional autobiography, is very like the "Eliot *in propria persona*" of Main's anthology, but his monologue is unrelieved by any serious effort at fictional particularity. Rather, the essays in *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* take for their subject how ideas manifest themselves in the world. The lack of an elaborated fictional world allows the play of moral discernment without a correlating demand for sympathy; although he adopts the posture of fellow sinner, Such has little pity for the figures he describes. Rather, he comes closest to the narrator of "The Lifted Veil" whom Neil Hertz characterizes as the exception to the "unnamed and practically uncharacterized" Eliot narrator (*George Eliot's Pulse*, 42). Hertz

connects the weird temporality of Latimer's narrative perspective to someone (like Deronda) who "may be responsible *for* happenings, not just responsive *to* them" (62), but we might equally connect him to Theophrastus Such through Thomas Albrecht's argument about the same story: that the "central conceit of telepathic power" has an "equivocal relation to the moral value Eliot calls sympathy" (*The Medusa Effect*, 98). If "The Lifted Veil" explores that relation through experimental narrative perspective, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* breaks altogether with concretely realized characters in order to escape the paradox of sympathetic discernment.

The shift from character to caricature introduces an alternative didactic tradition to the "sage" mode. Barbara Hardy argues that Eliot's novels are shaped by a "moral classification" in which characters are "sheep or goats, or shown as becoming sheep or goats, and this means that they take their places in a pattern of correspondence and contrast" (*Novels of George Eliot*, 79). The most interesting effect of a characterization that depends so heavily on specific moral traits is the degree to which it compromises the idea of characters as people. Isobel Armstrong makes the classic case that the commented world of *Middlemarch* is not only compatible with Eliot's sympathetic project but fundamentally concerned with it: "George Eliot is invoking understanding and pity by assuming a privileged experience on the part of the reader which enables him to grasp a negative and impoverished state of mind. What one may not know—or may not feel sympathy with—is approached through what one knows. In the same way, a generalized image is used to intensify involvement" ("'Middlemarch,'" 125–26).

The assumption of "privileged experience on the part of the reader" is instructive insofar as the generalizations teach new concepts and a more nuanced mode of generalizing, but such a process does not always intensify involvement. Armstrong's chief example is Casaubon, who is accorded more sympathy than a character like Rosamond. The generalized image often works not to engage the reader emotionally but rather to develop an intellectual understanding of the conceptual structure of the novel, to reformulate the mimetic drama as a moral problem to be coolly considered. Eliot's careful prose is designed, always, to provoke careful thinking: the commented world does not only interpret the narrated world; it delineates its abstract structure. Barbara Hardy argues—justly—that the central arc of moral development in Eliot runs from egoism to altruism. Yet there is not only a progressive development through critical moral discernment and fellow feeling but a dialectic opposi-

tion between them. The shifting form of Eliot's maxims has often been seen as a response to external changes in literary preference; it can also be understood as a product of a conflict in a moral philosophy. The qualified claims that characterize Eliot's prose embody the problem of making a clear, direct, authoritative statements while maintaining nuanced judgment. While the development of sympathy may depend on the power of generalization, careful moral discernment can also compromise sympathy. The commentative clauses in Eliot's fiction and essays model a form of conceptual discrimination that works by shaping observations into adequately careful language.

CHAPTER 4

Generalization and Declamation

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Present-Tense Poetics

> Following the lilt of her rhythm rather than the emotions of her characters, Mrs. Browning is swept on into generalization and declamation. Forced by the nature of her medium, she ignores the slighter, the subtler, the more hidden shades of emotion by which a novelist builds up touch by touch a character in prose. Change and development, the effect of one character upon another —all this is abandoned. The poem becomes one long soliloquy, and the only character that is known to us and the only story that is told us are the character and story of Aurora Leigh herself.
>
> VIRGINIA WOOLF, "AURORA LEIGH," 1931

"The interval between aspiration and performance; faith and dis-illusion; hope and fact"

The generalizations in George Eliot's novels are characterized by conceptual discrimination and laced with qualifications; the generalizations of Barrett Browning's ambitious *Aurora Leigh* tend, by contrast, to be sweeping. In Eliot's work, I have argued, recourse to the present tense draws on the generic resources of essay and satire. In *Aurora Leigh*, an epic in the shape of a novel, present-tense digressions resonate in two registers: as lyric digression or epic apostrophe within a past-tense narrative and as a novelistic signal of the heroine's evolving point of view. *Aurora Leigh* is shot through with philosophical generalizations about politics and literature, as well as with moral judgments of other characters. But to call such passages "digressions" fails to capture their disruptiveness, their complex relation to plot, and the urgency of their style. They are more like *declamations*, a term I borrow from Virginia Woolf's discussion of the poem. Woolf argues that *Aurora Leigh*'s poetry is its strength as a novel because it sweeps you forward; it is also its weakness as a novel, though, because "following the lilt of her rhythm rather than the emotions of her characters, Mrs. Browning is swept on into generalization and declamation. . . . The poem becomes one long soliloquy, and the only character that is known to us

and the only story that is told us are the character and story of Aurora Leigh herself" (525–26). I argue that it is particularly in passages in which Barrett Browning is "swept on" into present-tense generalizations that *Aurora Leigh* enacts its central aim to create a form of epic capable of pronouncing judgment on contemporary life.

At a glance, the most remarkable feature of *Aurora Leigh* is its length: the novel-epic spans over three hundred pages and 10,938 lines of blank verse. Here, I offer a strategy for reducing this text to a set of passages characterized by a set of grammatical and poetic features that read like errors. The stylistic features I trace tend to cluster in the passages most self-consciously aligned with the text's moral and aesthetic project to capture its age in poetry, and, moreover, they constitute a formal trace of that project. These are features that are grammatical but also poetic—features of imagery and rhythm that are not digitally identifiable. Looking at such a set of features allows you to read passages from across *Aurora Leigh* that don't fit together when you're focused on thematics. Major approaches to that novel tend to focus on Aurora's development as a poet in the context of a love plot *or* on her relationship with the working-class and idealized "fallen woman" Marian Erle. So far, the novel's conclusion is the only part of the text that seems to bring the two together. Yet by choosing my passages according to style rather than theme—by picking those threaded throughout the text that are characterized by what Virginia Woolf calls "generalisation and declamation"—a specific poetic stance emerges across the novel's disparate elements. By reading this set of passages together, I argue, a mode of judgment—committed, exaggerated—"epic" in the twenty-first-century sense as well as the nineteenth-century sense—emerges at the level of meter, image, and grammar.

While the scale of *Aurora Leigh* seems to suggest that local-level readings cannot do justice to its structure, I argue that it is at the level of the line that the text enacts, again and again, the mode of judgment that characterizes the perspective of the modern epic poet. Though moralizing happens at the level of the sentence here, it happens through and against poetic conventions legible only in context. The features that characterize "declamations" in *Aurora Leigh* pit prosaic diction and narrative structures from the novel against poetic features of repetition (anaphora), rapidly shifting imagery, and meter (from lines that push the bounds of correct meter to declamations that culminate in perfect iambic pentameter) that have been reshaped to foreground a process of continual reengagement with the present. Taken together, this set of features

establishes a provisional stance from which the epic poet in this text can pronounce on her age even as it unfolds around her.

William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1850) takes for its plot the shaping of the poet's consciousness: *The Prelude* is a story of recollection full of philosophical digression.[1] *Aurora Leigh* also narrates the shaping of the poet's consciousness, but only the first half is written as recollection. Books 1 through 4 comprise Aurora's reflections on her life and artistic achievement from age eighteen to twenty-six or twenty-seven, which are related with the "autobiographical finish" reminiscent of a spiritual autobiography, a conversion narrative related from a point of enlightenment from which prior actions can be rightly judged. In book 5, the story time "catches up" to the moment of discourse in an *ars poetica* calling for a modern-day epic like *Aurora Leigh*.[2]

Herbert Tucker argues that the temporal structure of *Aurora Leigh* grants a mature irony to its enthusiasm for introspection: "The forward motion of Aurora's point of view mobilizes an ongoing critique of the obsolescent certitudes that at any moment she has impulsively, confidently sworn by"; such certitudes are evidence of "Aurora's control-freak need to occupy a commanding vantage point" (*Epic*, 382). I would point out that even "impulsive," "confident" certitudes in this text manifest the acute awareness that they will be superseded. When the story of Aurora's maturity gives way to the portrayal of continuing development, the narrative of renewal repeats itself with each new installment. That the revelation narrative can be repeated—as it frequently is here—radically destabilizes the binary opposition between before and after in relation to enlightened judgment.[3]

The novelistic plot of gradual enlightenment contains passages of a poet's continued reengagement with unfolding reality—and the conclusion to the narrative resolves only the plot of the novel. The style of the poetry resists such closure. This style emerges in passages distributed across the novel; taken together, they mark out a philosophical stance implicit in it as *ars poetica, Bildungsroman,* and didactic essay by a prophet-poet.[4] As in the previous chapter, I begin by developing a central critical question about perspective in the text, which, here, is centrally concerned with temporal perspective. I then turn to a set of passages that deal with the role of the poet and that elucidate Barrett Browning's theory of poetry in terms of typical features that signal a position of committed judgment at the level of the line. By tracking passages in which these features tend to cluster, I draw together the "poetic and novelistic aspects" of the text—which have proven difficult to apprehend simultaneously.

The "revision" of judgment in *Aurora Leigh* is less a matter of going back than of simply starting over, and such starting over illustrates not the heroine's psychological development but a key aspect of the poet's vocation: to be ready to begin again with each moment. Aurora pauses to "Behold her Age"—the social and political world around her—despite not having lived past it, because that is what the epic poet should do. The model of judgment implicit in the stance of the poet in *Aurora Leigh* allows for the possibility of making strong claims about the present, in the present, despite the knowledge that perspective changes with time.

The tension between poetic proclamations and the ongoing narrative elements of *Aurora Leigh* has an important precedent in the major poem by Barrett Browning before it, *Casa Guidi Windows* (1847–51). If *Aurora Leigh* treats the problem of the poet in history through the story of a poet in fiction, *Casa Guidi Windows* demonstrates the problem of the poet in history by giving two "casts" of the present: a moment from 1847 and one from 1851. *Casa Guidi Windows* demonstrates poetic revision at a larger structural level. This poem was composed in two parts and published in one volume: the first part is written in a promising moment for Italian unity (1847), the second after its failure (1851). There is no revision of the first part in the editorial sense: the return of Grand Duke Leopold II in part 2 is simply appended to those celebratory verses in his honor in part 1.[5] The "Advertisement to the First Edition" gives a brief apology for the text's split perspective:

> The discrepancy between the two parts is a sufficient guarantee to the public of the truthfulness of the writer, who, though she certainly escaped the epidemic "falling sickness" of enthusiasm for Pio Nono, takes shame upon herself that she believed, like a woman, some royal oaths, and lost sight of the probable consequences of some obvious popular defects. If the discrepancy should be painful to the reader, let him understand that to the writer it has been more so. But such discrepancies we are called upon to accept at every hour by the conditions of our nature, implying the interval between aspiration and performance, between faith and dis-illusion, between hope and fact.

This passage defends the importance of preserving the record of discrepancy. Most critics emphasize the self-deprecation in the shame of having "believed, like a woman," and in the characterization of the poem as "a simple story of personal impressions" in another line, but the problem of a contingent feminine perspective is wedged in a larger discussion of historical perspective.[6] The lack of hindsight becomes a mark of "truthfulness"—the only hints of the

future in part 1 are the poem's own qualifications of its hopes regarding the new leadership.[7] While the first part was published after 1848 and so was already invested with a certain irony, the "discrepancies" aim to register, through the consciousness of an individual, a greater disappointment—one inherent to the "conditions of our nature."

As broad as this claim is, it is vital to the critical argument of *Aurora Leigh*, an edifice built of successive pronouncements, each delivered in a final, "truthful," present-tense style. Margaret Reynolds argues that *Aurora Leigh* and *Casa Guidi Windows* are fundamentally dissimilar despite their analogous temporal structures because, though "subjective error in *Casa Guidi Windows* is recognizably that, . . . [*Aurora Leigh*] told a new and unknown story where the reader was not to be permitted any indication which should help her to assess the partiality of its narrator by reference to historically verifiable fact" (*Aurora Leigh,* 27–28). Reynolds focuses on the reader's judgment of the poet, but the comparison looks different if we consider the poet's judgment of history instead. Because *Casa Guidi Windows* is keyed to history, it demonstrates the "interval between aspiration and performance" that registers not only political disappointment but the inevitable failure of the poet who pronounces on current events to predict their outcomes. The narrator's "partiality" is allowed to stand because it is implicit in the poet's role, according to which previous judgments are allowed to stand even if the discrepancy is "painful." In *Aurora Leigh*, such discrepancies at the level of the line demonstrate in miniature this mode of poetic judgment.

Present-Tense Poetics: Key Patterns in *Aurora Leigh's* Greatest Hits

Most criticism on *Aurora Leigh* begins by citing the following passage on double vision, which has been read as the solution to several binaries that structure it.[8] In the context of Aurora's larger argument here, however, the poet's eyes figure the challenge of taking a temporal perspective that is simultaneously embedded and remote.[9] Aurora argues that "every age, / Through being beheld too close, is ill-discerned / By those who have not lived past it" (5.166–68). The poet argues for a "double vision":

> But poets should
> Exert a double vision; should have eyes
> To see near things as comprehensively

> As if afar they took their point of sight,
> And distant things as intimately deep
> As if they touched them. Let us strive for this. (5.183–88)

The modern epic poet requires a critical double vision that recognizes the small scale as well as the large. "Double vision" is impossible—a mixed metaphor in its very definition here as having eyes that "see" and "touch"—but the poet's attempt to pronounce on the present moment changes the texture of poetic language. Here, I want to note that these lines interrupt themselves, beginning again from the middle at the word "should," repeating the opening word of the clause.: "Poets should / Exert a double vision; *should* have eyes / To see near things" (my emphasis). A semicolon splices complete thoughts together, replacing the first stressed "should" (at the end of a line) with a second to deliver a new, more explicit directive. This repetition is, in a sense, an abbreviated anaphora, but since it only repeats once, it is more like a syntactic hiccup, a second take. The poet's prerogative to use line to structure meaning (it is possible to begin again with the second word in a sentence as if the first had never happened) here enacts a commitment to the possibility of making a new beginning at any moment to find a more expressive phrase or a new way of seeing. The central problem of the poem, then, is how to gain critical purchase on the unfolding present.

The distinction between a character-based reading for the plot and an attention to the polemic and style of *Aurora Leigh* is clearest in the first sentence of the first stanza, a key passage for critics who seek to make sense of the modern epic in terms of the gradual *Bildung* of its main character. This stanza makes use of the syntactic hiccup in the "should" / "should" of the double vision passage. Anaphora elaborates on the connotations of a concept by reiterating it and works according to a logic of poetic repetition rather than syntactic rules. The syntactic hiccup uses the rhetorical convention of anaphora to start again from the middle of an idea; it repeats a word in order to replace an initial idea with a subsequent one.[10] *Aurora Leigh* opens with a reflection on writing in time and a feminist self-assertion that the poet, having written "For others' uses, will write now for mine." But then the word "will" repeats (after a line break and double punctuation of hyphen and comma), as if the poet has thought again and changed what she wants to say. This break transforms the simple claim "will write now" into a complex simile:

> Of writing many books there is no end;
> And I who have written much in prose and verse

> For others' uses, will write now for mine,—
> Will write my story for my better self
> As when you paint your portrait for a friend,
> Who keeps it in a drawer and looks at it
> Long after he has ceased to love you, just
> To hold together what he was and is. (1.1–8)

The portrait simile enacts a process of increasing self-estrangement, changing its terms at the end of each line, resurfacing a long way off from where it began. First, Aurora writes for her uses, then, for her "better self," which is subsequently figured as "you," who paints his or her portrait for a friend—who turns out to be someone who keeps the portrait in a drawer and looks at it (in a breathlessly enjambed modifying clause) *after* he has ceased to love you! If the "turn" in a Shakespearean sonnet often refigures its central conceit in the last two lines, there are "turns" in this stanza at every new line. The two "will" clauses do not add up—the second does not "grow" from the first. The poem stands in for a painting that "holds together" the past and present precisely through its accretion of perspectives.

I foreground the changing *stance* in this sentence rather than its strange divisions of Aurora's narrating self in order counter a critical tendency that seeks to justify the conflicting perspectives within it. Alison Case reads this simile in terms of Aurora's psychology and the love plot—that it, she explains its discrepancies by invoking character psychology and narrative irony.[11] The problem with this argument is that it privileges the text's larger structure at the expense of dynamic movement within this sentence. By attending to the progression of this stanza, clause by clause, it becomes possible to see how its perspective changes with the movement of the verse and the movement of the sentence. The difficult problems in the metaphor of self and other, visual and verbal art, artist and beholder are allowed to resonate in the only partially satisfying resolution of the passage. Rather than delaying a sense of closure for the future ending, this figuratively complex—and barely coherent—passage concludes, provisionally, with a metrically regular line (of which more later). The portrait that holds together what the friend was and is gives no hint at what he will become. Recognizing present-tense poetics as central to the project of *Aurora Leigh* works against an ironic reading of the text that privileges the belated knowledge we have at the end—a kind of knowledge that deauthorizes what has come before.

A poet should renounce hindsight for engagement with the present: double vision is the continual striving to see "near things" *as if* one were narrating from an achieved ending. This formulation is peculiarly relevant to this novel-epic because it gives up retrospective perspective halfway through, reaching the present and striking out into the unknown. Barrett Browning created a hybrid form suited to representing double vision. The form of this new epic, like Lukàcs's novel in *Theory of the Novel*, is invented rather than given.[12] Aurora Leigh demands that the poet capture the living present by creating a kind of cast:

> Never flinch,
> But still, unscrupulously epic, catch
> Upon the burning lava of a song
> The full-veined, heaving, double-breasted Age:
> That, when the next shall come, the men of that
> May touch the impress with reverent hand, and say
> "Behold, - behold the paps we all have sucked!
> This bosom seems to beat still, or at least
> It sets ours beating: this is living art,
> Which thus presents and thus records true life." (5.213–22)

That is to say, the best figure for modern epic is an imprint of a bare breast in lava. In this passage, Aurora reimagines epic, the highest and most masculine of genres, as feminine on all counts; the "Age" itself is feminine, as is the shape and medium of its preservation (lava).[13] The momentary impression is adamantine: the poet's "impression" is not a sketch but a mold cast in igneous rock. This image evokes an idea of lyric as a frozen instant. Monique Morgan's treatment of lyric in *Narrative Means, Lyric Ends*, emphasizes its position against the novel's narrative movement. I would call our attention to the context of this image as part of an *argument* about what the poet should do. The epic poet ought to create a frozen impression of events or —as it would ultimately be—a series of such impressions or casts. As a model of judgment, this is significantly different from the gradual growth that structures the development of the main character of a *Bildungsroman*, whose understanding develops over time.

The form of *Aurora Leigh* as a modern-day epic demands from the poet a strong commitment to the present moment that trumps the novelistic demand for sustained development of perspective, and the commitment is visible in passages throughout the text as present-tense style. Here, a syntactic hiccup inscribes new interpretive possibilities into an already complete sentence; images

change dramatically without apology; iambic resolutions (that seem conclusive) prompt serious challenges couched in the form of a question that prompt more questions. Perspectives from before and after—a vision and its revision—sit adjacent to one another, and each represents a new viewpoint in time.

Epic Simile, Mixed Metaphor

Barrett Browning's notion of modern epic as a cast, or a series of casts, also has implications for the way imagery works in this poem: instead of exploring the details and implications of a single image, the poet transforms such images in the course of describing them. The second feature of present-tense style is protean imagery, which, on the spectrum of poetic images is somewhere between figural language and mixed metaphor: an epic simile run amok. Tucker treats *Aurora Leigh* as one of the Spasmodic epics that makes extraordinary use of the epic simile (*Epic*, 28). He characterizes Spasmodic poetics as a mid-nineteenth century extreme romanticism the tenets of which included "the centrality of the self, the sanctity of the moment of heightened perception, and the totality of truth to which creative poets enjoy privileged if fitful access" (382).[14] He argues that the temporal structure of *Aurora Leigh* pulls it back from the brink of ecstatic naïveté—which, like other accounts, privileges mature or ironic hindsight over the impressions of a moment. I argue such poetics are important to this text because they established a precedent of vivid imagery and outrageous metaphor that made a great freedom of register available to the midcentury poet. Algernon Charles Swinburne's 1898 introduction to *Aurora Leigh* credits Barrett Browning and her book with the Spasmodic ideal of "the rush and glow and ardour of aspiring and palpitating life" (prefatory note, viii). An 1857 review by Coventry Patmore indicates that the shock effect of Barrett Browning's images (remember the full-veined, heaving, double-breasted Age) was muted by context: "The command of imagery shown by Mrs. Browning is really surprising, even in this day when every poetaster seems to be endowed with a more or less startling amount of that power; but Mrs. Browning seldom goes out of her way for an image, as nearly all our other versifiers are in the habit of doing continually" ("Mrs. Browning's Poems," 462).[15] The intensity of Spasmodic imagery in *Aurora Leigh* becomes a way to model an evolving temporal perspective through shifting images. At the simplest level, a common figure of speech gains vibrancy from being yoked to another image. For instance, when Aurora reflects on writing for money in the early part of her career (book 3),

she playfully transforms a literal image of writing into a metaphor: "I was constrained, for life, / To work with one hand for the booksellers / While working with the other for myself / And art: you swim with feet as well as hands / Or make small way" (3.302–6). The effect of this quickly shifting passage is to suggest a person first writing with both hands—and then with feet. Since you need metrical feet to write blank verse, Aurora's hands are free to write for the reviews. Such protean imagery calls attention to the way language unfolds in time—how new words transform what came before them. Thus, inconsistent imagery is one way of modeling the poet's changing perspective. Another image pair follows a few lines later: "What you do / For bread, will taste of common grain, not grapes, / Although you have a vineyard in Champagne" (3.321–23). The banal metaphor of "working for bread" is juxtaposed with a heightened figure of itself (working for wine), and the rhyme between "grain / Champagne," both stressed, pulls the bread and wine together even as it highlights the contrast between the two modes of production. Aurora generalizes about mundane critical prose through a trick of expression made only available by line. Such imagery demonstrates in the poet (and demands from the reader) a willingness to accept the transformation of what has come before.

The mode of judgment modeled by such image shifting flouts the principle of consistency. The exemplary instance of rapidly changing images is the mixed metaphor, which reads like a rhetorical mistake but actually records an oddly concrete concatenation of changing perceptions. When Aurora describes tearing up her first unpublished poems, she figures herself as a murderer, then writes herself out of the image to make it purely abstract.[16] As with the image of the two hands writing, this passage begins with a literal image that becomes metaphorical. By the end of the sentence, the "verses" have become an abstraction:

> —I ripped my verses up,
> And found no blood upon the rapier's point;
> The heart in them was just an embryo's heart
> Which never yet had beat, that it should die;
> Just gasps of make-believe galvanic life;
> Mere tones, inorganized to any tune. (3.245–50)

The thwarted murder becomes an image of a fetus, undead rather than dying, then a thing animated by electric shocks, and finally merely "tones." In asserting the bloodlessness of the early verses, the poet transforms the image of

murder into abortion, then into something inorganic, and finally into something incorporate. That is, the destroyed poems fail to meet the Spasmodic criterion of capturing "aspiring and palpitating life," but there is nevertheless a "more or less startling" freedom in the way the description of images morph into one another in the poet's judgment of the verses. The passage has inconsistencies and broken parallels; in the syntactic hiccup, of "just an embryo's heart" to "just gasps," the noun changes to the plural, even while it becomes less concrete—"gasps" are evidence of a process rather than an object. A further transformation takes place in the synonym of "just" in the final line: "mere tones." In its posture of reducing a stanza to a single idea in the final line, this conclusion is reminiscent of "just / To hold together what he was and is." I want to call attention to the regularity of the final line because the third feature of a present-tense poetics is the soon-to-be-obsolescent certitudes on which many passages come to rest. The passage on catching the age in lava that I quoted earlier edges into hexameter in the penultimate line only to drop into emphatic regularity: Poets write so that future generations "may touch the impress with reverent hand and say / 'Behold, —behold the paps we all have sucked!' " (5.214–25).

The call for judgment in present-tense style demands that the poet reach a conclusion, however provisional. Aurora's self-critique of her first published pastoral concludes in iambic pentameter—twice. The following passage from book 5 deals with past verse, which is literally an impress of the poet's former thoughts. Amid the literary theory in book 5, Aurora pauses to reflect on her own "false" pastoral:

> Even so my pastoral failed: it was a book
> Of surface-pictures—pretty, cold, and false
> With literal transcript,—the worse done, I think,
> For being not ill-done: let me set my mark
> Against such doings, and do otherwise.
>
> This strikes me. —If the public whom we know
> Could catch me at such admissions, I should pass
> For being right modest. Yet how proud we are,
> In daring to look down upon ourselves! (5.130–38)

These paired stanzas, taken together, endorse rigorous self-critique and just as frankly acknowledge its limitations. I give both these stanzas complete: to

have two "unlinked" verse paragraphs back to back is unusual in this poem, as paragraphs are more often linked by a single broken line. Here, the two are linked instead by the poet's train of thought: the second stanza opens with a critique of self-critique in the first paragraph. "And do otherwise" is far from a triumphant conclusion, and no sooner does the poet arrive at it than she transforms it into a point of departure.

My reading of this passage is consonant with Emily Harrington's argument that Barrett Browning's inventive rhythms express a sense of freedom.[17] Such rushing rhythm is also a key feature of the committed present-tense style. These lines violate any rigidly formal, or "pretty" meter: "If the public . . . [c]ould catch me at such admissions" is itself an invitation to catch the poet out for taking shortcuts with her meter ("E'en so my past'ral failed"; "lit'ral transcript"). This passage also includes a syntactic hiccup, in which a phrase set off by dashes seems to offer itself as a substitute for the preceding phrase, though no word is repeated: the "book / Of surface pictures" is modified twice. The poet's pictures are described first as "pretty, cold, and false" and then as "the worse done . . . for being not ill-done." The poet's impatience with outgrown conventions (of pastoral, of public opinion) is registered at the level of rhythm and resolved at the end of each stanza in the perfect pentameter of fresh resolutions. Aurora moralizes the terms of critical self-judgment by linking that judgment to a religiously inflected idea of mortal limitations—the "conditions of our nature" of the *Casa Guidi Windows*' advertisement. Rather than understanding a ringing line of resolution as a return to metrical conformity, I see it as a stylistic choice to come to a strong conclusion. Thus present-tense style uses the flexibility of iambic pentameter to signal the moment of a serious (if temporary) resolution.

Perversely Trivial, Carelessly Dry: Prose in Poetry

Against the resounding conclusions of declamations lurks a structure-defying rhythm that verges on prose: another strategic error. Barrett Browning described her "*chief intention*" in writing *Aurora Leigh* as "running into the midst of our conventions, and rushing into drawing-rooms and the like" (*Brownings' Correspondence,* letter 1852).[18] Ironically, the method of creating epic poetry out of modern life by incorporating a novel-like evocation of the rhythm of spoken language makes *Aurora Leigh* vulnerable to the charge of not being poetry at all.

Signs that the present-tense style has a tendency not only to borrow from the everyday style of prose but to collapse into it emerge in several early readings of *Aurora Leigh*. Coventry Patmore argues that these lines detailing "Aurora's English school programme," "with many hundreds of lines like them, have certainly no right to be called verse" ("Mrs. Browning's Poems," 452). In her 1905 book on Barrett Browning, Germaine-Marie Merlette complains that (as opposed to *Paradise Lost*) "too often, the long passages [*tirades*] of *Aurora Leigh* resemble prose" (*La vie et l'oeuvre*, 357). (She cites 5.613–18, which begin: "She's very pretty, Lady Waldemar"). Henry Chorley pairs these eight lines with a passage of dialogue snippets in his review for the *Athenaeum* as examples of "perversely trivial" and "carelessly dry" passages that (he argues) permeate "too many pages" of the poem (1426).[19] Present-tense style adapts the everyday language of the novel, risking triviality for the chance to create an epic from the "conventions" of the day. In the same year that Patmore's review of Barrett Browning's poetry appeared, he also published the influential "Essay on English Metrical Law," in which he argues that "the language should always seem to *feel*, though not to *suffer* from the bonds of verse" (qtd. in Prins, "Victorian Meters," 108).

Barrett Browning, as an epic poet after Milton and Wordsworth, is heir to the flexible rhythm of blank verse and criticizes the dramatist who inherits the relatively circumscribed notions of the five-act structure and "literal unities of time and place" (5.233). (So powerful is the convention of the five-act drama that if one added another, "Shakspeare's ghost could scarcely plead / Against our just damnation" [5.246–47]). The poet's adaptation of meter is the opposite of the dramatist's restriction within the demands of tradition:[20]

> Five acts to make a play.
> And why not fifteen? why not ten? or seven?
> What matter for the number of the leaves,
> Supposing the tree lives and grows? exact
> The literal unities of time and place,
> When 't is the essence of passion to ignore
> Both time and place? Absurd. Keep up the fire
> And leave the generous flames to shape themselves. (5. 229–36)

The rhythm of this passage plays against its meter. Such metrical experimentation—particularly the string of rhetorical questions that break up the rhythm—can make such passages feel prosier as well as more poetic. In its adoption of

rhetorical questions and speechlike fragments—"And why not fifteen? Why not ten? Or seven?"—the language of *Aurora Leigh* reflects a commitment to capturing contemporary life.

Patterns that characterize everyday speech in the novel are a feature of present-tense style that effects a sharp ironic contrast between a provisional conclusion and whatever comes after the conclusion. Rhetorical questions, defined by Biber and his colleagues in the *Longman Grammar* as those "expressing an opinion rather than asking a question" are found in monologue and dialogue alike and are often used to interrogate the temporary certitudes (206). In book 7, when Aurora Leigh is at a professional high and a personal low, she begins to dilate on the possibility that love "strikes higher" than art, and she breaks midline to question her own reasoning:

> Art itself
> We've called the larger life, must feel the soul
> Live past it. For more's felt than is perceived,
> And more's perceived than can be interpreted, and
> Love strikes higher with his lambent flame
> Than Art can pile the faggots.
>
> Is it so?
> When Jove's hand meets us with composing touch,
> And when at last we are hushed and satisfied,
> Then Io does not call it truth, but love?
> Well, well! (7.889–98)

The first claim concludes "than Art can pile the faggots" at the seventh syllable only to be called into question by the eighth—"Is it so?" We might characterize this aspect of the style as shooting first and asking questions later. Even in the dawn of Aurora's belief in the importance of love to art (which will be central to the union with Romney in book 9), she doubts. The skeptical second verse paragraph is rhythmically continuous with the first: it picks up the last three syllables of the "concluding" line and forces the two lines together despite the change in register from high poetical (like the assertion that love can build a higher fire than art) to challenging and self-reflective ("Is it so?"). The "Well, well!" that comes after the figured question about Jove and Io is a metrical insert—a way to fill time—but it is also a discourse marker, a response that marks "continuation with contrast" in speech (Biber et al., *Longman Grammar*, 1086).[21]

The most serious aesthetic crisis in the book—Aurora's shaken faith in art—is registered here through disruptive, present-tense digressions.

I have suggested that *Aurora Leigh* demonstrates a process of judgment rather than advocates an ideological position. In the present-tense passages the poet consistently, almost recklessly commits herself to judgments—and the positions she takes are sometimes inconsistent in consequence. Thus far, I have focused on declamations and their boundaries: the rhetorical questions or double takes that prompt them; the end-stopped lines that (provisionally) conclude them; and features that many of Barrett Browning's contemporaries loved or hated about the poem (its flexible meter and "startling" images). The novel plot plays out some of the implications of such judgments when characters speak or write in this epic style.

The Novel-Epic: A Form Invented, Not Given

George Eliot's relative clauses modify key nouns to achieve the argumentative precision of an essay; Barrett Browning's poetic play draws on the resources of the novel as well as epic. Dorothy Mermin observes that even at the poem's publication, "reviewers distinguished between poetic and novelistic aspects, whether or not they approved of the mixture; some admired the intensely poetical sections which others found strained and excessive, and some liked the pathos or the social satire" (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 223). I find, with Mermin, that the formal elements of "intensely poetic" sections are connected to the "pathos" and "social satire," but I trace that connection through a specific set of shared stylistic features.

The most novelistic part of *Aurora Leigh* might be its marriage plot, which, like Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), brings together a hero and heroine who each embody a term within a larger conflict of ideas. Romney is a utilitarian and Aurora a poet, representing, as Barrett Browning wrote in a letter to John Kenyon, a figured opposition between "Real & Ideal" (*Brownings' Correspondence,* letter 3534). When Romney and Aurora marry, both elements are revealed (in five hundred lines of dialogue between the characters) to be integral to the "New Jerusalem" that dawns at the conclusion of the text. This is the version of *Aurora Leigh* to be found in volume E, "The Victorian Age," of the ninth edition of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, but it is only part of the story.[22] The "rest" of the story contains elements from social problem fiction and gothic fiction and a character named Marian Erle.[23] Marian has

been a central figure in debates about politics, feminism, sentiment, and genre in *Aurora Leigh* since its first publication. Amanda Anderson argues that she ultimately figures Barrett Browning in her most radical assertion of independence, the final refusal of Romney's proposal. Sharon Marcus makes a compelling case for Marian's structural importance as the facilitator of Aurora and Romney's marriage. Here, I argue that the contiguity of style between Marian's self-defense and Aurora's larger poetic declamations is an integral part of her vindication. In book 6, Marian makes the case for her innocence in present-tense poetics through dialogue with Aurora. This conversation demonstrates the radical shift in perspective that moral judgment can demand and that a present-tense stance ready to pronounce anew in new circumstances can effect.

Barrett Browning demanded of her new form that it allow as much "philosophical dreaming & digression (which is in fact a characteristic of the age) as I like to use" (qtd. in Stone, "Critical Introduction," x). The structure of these passages—rhetorical questions followed by a series of illuminating images, each one offering a radically different take on any given situation, followed by a claim, and more rhetorical questions—seems built for a purpose quite distinct from the plot: to exercise the poet's right to engage with history and philosophy. Nevertheless, such declamations permeate the most plot-rich parts of *Aurora Leigh*. The sage-like generalization sets a tone of cultural authority before the book hazards its greatest political risk: the vindication of Marian. Book 6, which describes Aurora's confrontation with Marian in Paris, begins with 136 lines of verse about France. The passage moves easily between contemporary cultural criticism and history, the belated Louis Napoleon and the legacy of the French revolution. In her consideration of Barrett Browning's debt to "expatriate poetry culture," Alison Chapman observes that "it is common critical currency to argue that Barrett Browning's 1856 verse novel represents a decisive shift in women's poetry away from the English poetess and toward a more muscular, political, public, epic poetics" (*Networking the Nation,* 277). It is worth noting how the perspectives are pulled together within book 6, the first paragraph of which is a *tirade* against English provincialism. I include it in full to give a sense of the declamatory mode here:

> The English have a scornful insular way
> Of calling the French light. The levity
> Is in the judgment only, which yet stands,
> For say a foolish thing but oft enough

(And here's the secret of a hundred creeds,
Men get opinions as boys learn to spell,
By re-iteration chiefly,) the same thing
Shall pass at last for absolutely wise,
And not with fools exclusively. And so
We say the French are light, as if we said
The cat mews or the milch-cow gives us milk:
Say rather, cats are milked and milch-cows mew;
For what is lightness but inconsequence,
Vague fluctuation 'twixt effect and cause
Compelled by neither? Is a bullet light,
That dashes from the gun-mouth, while the eye
Winks and the heart beats one, to flatten itself
To a wafer on the white speck on a wall
A hundred paces off? Even so direct,
So sternly undivertible of aim,
Is this French people. (6.1–21)

The heaviness of the spondee "French light" gives an ironic emphasis to the notion of their lightness: if "lightness" is fluctuation, the French are as sure as a bullet. The poetic corrective to the "re-iteration" by which men get opinions is a reordered syntax that transforms what we know about cats and cows into nonsense. The present-tense style that infuses the moral argument of *Aurora Leigh* is partly authorized by Elizabeth Barrett Browning's public role as a poet.

After Aurora just glimpses Marian in Paris, she decides to let Romney know by letter that she has seen her. Up to the point of writing the letter, Aurora has not revealed to the reader that she has in fact seen Marian with a baby in her arms. Her reflection is full of elements of present-tense style—rhetorical questions followed by a metaphor in which the images quickly slip into abstractions and back into concrete language, and concluding with a final exclamation:

Can I write to *him*
A half-truth? can I keep my own soul blind
To the other half, . . . the worse? What are our souls
If still, to run on straight a sober pace
Nor start at every pebble or dead leaf,
They must wear blinkers, ignore facts, suppress
Six tenths of the road? Confront the truth, my soul! (6.336–42)

Aurora's question about "our souls" is ultimately a question about her own capacity to face facts, which she does, in part, by the pause that renames "the other half," "the worse." Only the necessity of drawing an emphatic conclusion to a series of questions makes it possible for Aurora to say in so many words (in the passage following this) that she has seen Marian with a baby, and consequently to think through its implications. In this scene, the style of judgment implicit in *Aurora Leigh* emerges in a monologue and shapes the way the character Aurora interprets her circumstances. The demand of the present-tense style to come to a strong conclusion pushes Aurora toward recognizing "the truth"—admitting to herself that Marian had a baby, even if here it results in misinterpretation (that is, takes the baby as evidence of Marian's guilt instead of her victimization). The style of deliberation that demands even partial judgment, which prevents Aurora from denying what she has seen, will also ultimately lead to her confronting Marian and ultimately to committing herself—just as thoroughly—to proclaiming Marian's innocence.

In fact, one of the best examples of present-tense style declamation—weaving together exclamations, rapidly shifting imagery in a passionate pronouncement—doesn't come from Aurora at all or even her opposite, Romney, but Marian Erle herself. If, as Woolf argues, "generalizations and declamations" undermine character and plot, then they are the most important parts of the text's work as contemporary epic.

Marian Erle as Epic Poet

As a working-class character drawn from social problem fiction, Marian is doubly marginalized with respect to the aristocratic epic heroine. Marian's speech is reported indirectly by Aurora in their first encounter, but in their debate over her story, she speaks for herself. Cora Kaplan calls this the "embourgeoisement" of Marian Erle; I call it a dramatization of exemplary poetic judgment. Kaplan, with Woolf, is right to emphasize the language these characters share. The confrontation takes place in Marian's room, when Aurora discovers Marian's baby sleeping sweetly. Marian says, "How beautiful," and Aurora answers:

> —"Ay! the child is well enough,"
> I answered. "If his mother's palms are clean
> They need be glad of course in clasping such;
> But if not, I would rather lay my hand,

Were I she, on God's brazen altar-bars
Red-hot with burning sacrificial lambs,
Than touch the sacred curls of such a child."

She plunged her fingers in his clustering locks,
As one who would not be afraid of fire;
And then with indrawn steady utterance said,
"My lamb, my lamb! although, through such as thou,
The most unclean got courage and approach
To God, once,—now they cannot, even with men,
Find grace enough for pity and gentle words." (6.617–30)

Aurora's attack on Marian pulls together religious images (the altar, the lamb, the fires of hell) that quickly morph from touching red-hot altar bars to the lambs sacrificed on them. In the subsequent seven lines, Marian reworks each part of the image. She asserts her innocence literally by "plunging her fingers" into the baby's curls and verbally by changing Aurora's sacrificial "lamb" into a term of endearment. Marian invokes scripture, transforming the baby from a "sacrificial lamb" into an intermediary between sinners and God. Undaunted, Aurora reappropriates the idea of the lamb: 'My Marian,' I made answer, grave and sad, / 'The priest who stole a lamb to offer him,/Was still a thief" (6.631–653). After a long exchange, Aurora comes to her point, that Marian's crime was to leave "he pure place and the noble heart, to take / The hand of a seducer" (6.746–47). Marian seizes control of the image, reproachfully:

What, "seduced" 's your word?
Do wolves seduce a wandering fawn in France?
Do eagles, who have pinched a lamb with claws,
Seduce it into carrion? So with me.
I was not ever, as you say, seduced,
But simply, murdered. (6.766–71)

Marian takes on the poet's prerogative of rewriting connotation through imagery and of incorporating the interjection that emphasizes the spoken element of their dialogue ("as you say").[24] This is an important shift from earlier in the poem, when Aurora first hears Marian's story and retells it for her, "with fuller utterance, / As coloured and confirmed in aftertimes / By others and herself too" (3.828–30). I take the poet's "fuller utterance" to be a reexpression of a spoken story in metrical form—as Marian speaks above, giving full extramet-

rical energy to the question "Do wolves seduce a wand'ring fawn in France?" In the contest between Aurora and Marian for control of the moral image, Aurora capitulates when Marian transforms the image. Marian is often read as a double for Aurora: that relation is dramatized in this dialogue. The conversation between Aurora and Marian could almost have been written as adjacent stanzas, in which the latter would challenge the former by asking "Is it so?," just as Aurora breaks midline to question her own reasoning in book 7. The pattern of interrogating previous ideas visible in the reflection on art and love is represented here as a debate between characters. Angela Leighton argues that Barrett Browning is able to treat the subject of fallen women through a "ruse" of the "triple female speaker of this poem—Barrett Browning, Aurora and Marian" (*Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 475). In this scene, though, Marian and Aurora are figured separately, as opponents who face off in one language. The dramatization of Aurora's high poetic style reveals the dialectic inherent in its continually changing perspective.

Aurora Leigh as Argument

One feels the most pressing sense of time in Aurora's narrative in the energetic movement from one pronouncement to the next—the sweeping diatribe about whatever strikes the poet. Her continual incautious engagement with reality, marked by declamatory present-tense style, is distinct from the narrative closure the novelistic structure provides.[25] If we read *Aurora Leigh* primarily as a poem, then the energy of the line-by-line movement cannot simply be folded back into the novel plot. The irony of the central character's limited perspective is not simply that of a woman who does not know her own heart—the plot of delay in Ruth Yeazell's *Fictions of Modesty*—but that of a poet who must serve as a philosophical and moral light in her times despite being as embedded in time as anyone else. In *Political Poetess*, Tricia Lootens emphasizes Elizabeth Barrett Browning's engagement with national and international issues. Of the engagement with a kind of white class privilege in "Curse of a Nation," Lootens writes that it is "no grounds for silence. There are positions from which being right, or even hoping to be right, is an unattainable luxury, moments at which to 'write'—as thoughtfully as possible—must be enough" (*Political Poetess*, 179).

Aurora Leigh, as I have suggested, makes an argument for poetic double vision and for the idea that art should represent the ideal growing out of the real. In fact, it argues for many things. Martha Nussbaum claims in *Poetic Justice* that

Hard Times (1853) condemns the abstracting tendency in utilitarian thought through the metaphor of the circus and the characters of the Gradgrind children; *Aurora Leigh* condemns the abstracting tendency in utilitarian thought not only in metaphor and plot but by present-tense poetics and hundreds of lines of debate between Romney and Aurora. *Aurora Leigh* is as much a theoretical text as a narrative one—closer in its programmatic commitment to the ethical and political power of art to *Poetic Justice* than to *Hard Times*. *Aurora Leigh* is explicitly polemical. Dickens's expanded reporting clauses challenge the idea of sincerity precisely by implying no necessary relationship between what a character says and how he says it. George Eliot's "which" models a habit of thought, but at no point does Eliot *argue* that the reader should emulate the linguistic pattern of the narrative. *Aurora Leigh*, however, makes the case for a certain mode of poetic engagement and develops a style and amalgamations of literary form to model it. Blank verse easily accommodates an intruding idea—no stanza sets a limit on length, and no rhyme forces it to link backward to the point of departure. These aesthetic aspects of *Aurora Leigh* signal its development of a perspectival stance suited to the modern epic poet. The importance of polemic in one of the most formally innovative texts of the nineteenth century shows the deep connection between moral purpose and aesthetic language in the period.

I have considered here the duality in *Aurora Leigh* between an embedded and a detached perspective, which looks less like the poet's cultivated distance from the present than an assertion of how the poet owes nothing to past selves. The "declamations" are, in one way, a classic case of Victorian moralizing as a break from the story, though woven throughout the text at the level of the line. In my final chapter, I turn to the novels of Charles Dickens and to another judgmental perspective that, like George Eliot's, emphasizes the distance between narrator and character. Dickens, like Eliot, uses certain kinds of clauses to inscribe processes of making judgments about the characters and events in the story. Thus, rather than promoting specific values, such clauses naturalize moral judgment as part of "reading" other people. In Eliot, a consideration of hybrid past-present sentences led me to the study of a particular type; in Elizabeth Barrett Browning, I considered a constellation of forms that, taken together, comprise a distinctive style connected to key critical questions about poetic and gendered authority in *Aurora Leigh*. In the next chapter, I return with a bump to the idea of reductive reading by looking at a form less obviously illuminated by nineteenth-century aesthetic and ethical critical debates: speech tags.

CHAPTER 5

A Moral Technology

Speech Tags in Charles Dickens's Dialogue

> There was not much in these three words, but there must have been something in the manner in which they were said, to attract attention, for the schoolmaster and his companion looked steadily at each other for a few seconds, and then exchanged a very meaning smile.
>
> CHARLES DICKENS, *NICHOLAS NICKLEBY*, 1839

Narrated Dialogue: Between Showing and Telling

To reformulate the project here in generic terms: I have considered how Elizabeth Barrett Browning plays the novel's narrative past tense against the poet's present and how George Eliot draws from essayistic conventions to portray judgment in the novel. Here, I consider the intersection of the novel and the theater in the dialogue of Charles Dickens by reducing the scope of inquiry to that element of dialogue that consists not in what characters say but *how* they say it: the matrix of narrative material around character speech. What I suggest is that speech tags are a technique for representing moral aspects of character keyed to sincerity. Character emerges here in relation to other characters, and the representation of interiority, such as it is, exaggerates the textual analogy with "reading" at the heart of judging others. Descriptions of character manner give the reader insight into other people from the outside.

I begin by bringing together work on theatricality in Dickens with considerations of the stakes of one-on-one ethical contact in his novels (in terms of reading other people and as such contact is opposed to systemic awareness), focusing on speech tags (also known as reporting clauses or inquits): the he said / she saids that attribute speeches to a character. To do this, I draw on

statistical studies of Dickens's dialogue by Mark Lambert, Masahiro Hori, and Michaela Mahlberg. In its narrowing focus on a single element of Dickens's rich characterization practices, this chapter is an example of reductive reading as well as an argument in its favor. By reducing my inquiry to those clauses describing how characters have spoken, I create a through line between early scenes from *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* and the later *Bleak House*. My argument about how to understand dialogue in Dickens then turns to a study of speech-tag placement across a corpus of 220 English and Irish novels—which shifts the focus of analysis from questions about interiority, distance, and sympathy in Dickens's literary-historical context to the rise of character and narrator in the nineteenth-century novel. I return to *Bleak House* by way of speech tags to show how the notorious problem of interpretation in that novel works at the level of narrated dialogue among characters. What are the implications of this formal technique against a wider backdrop of dialogue in the nineteenth-century novel? And how does that perspective, in turn, change our understanding of character in Dickens?

One story about nineteenth-century literature traces a shift from "telling," associated with a moralizing, effusive narrator, to "showing," associated with the relatively objective representation of dialogue that demands the reader judge for herself, a shift to the privileging of mimesis over diegesis. How does a shift toward "showing" actually show up in print? To formulate this question this way is, in some sense, obtuse. But to return to this fundamental distinction is, I hope, to transform it. The basic form of presenting character through dialogue, I suggest, is something we think we understand—but don't yet. In fact, I think we actually know more about Anne Banfield's unspeakable sentences (1982) and the range of alternative methods of reporting discourse articulated by Monika Fludernik in the *Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction* (1993).[1] In *Transparent Minds* (1978), one of Dorrit Cohn's first argumentative moves is to claim that "showing" is less about the representation of character speech than about the techniques for representing character consciousness.[2] I'd like to reframe directly reported speech as narrated dialogue in response to Cohn's narrated monologue. If narrated monologue "equivocates," in her terms, between "the language a character uses when he talks to himself" and the "grammar a narrator uses in talking about him," narrated dialogue punctuates the shift between how a character talks to others and how the narrator talks about him (*Transparent Minds*, 105). These sentences formally announce the divide between dramatic performance and textual narration.

Dickens embellishes his scenes of dialogue with descriptions of character manner, tone, gesture, and expression; a strong line in Dickens criticism links this to a bid to capture theatrical or melodramatic expressiveness.[3] An early review of *The Pickwick Papers* argues that "it is in the intermixture of description and dialogue—of the language and tournure—the modes and costumes of [Dickens's] characters—that his merits and his triumph consist" ("Some Thoughts on Arch-Waggery, and in Especial, on the Genius of 'Boz,'" 34–35). This chapter is dedicated to tournure, defined by the *OED* as a "(graceful) manner or bearing; cultivated address" : the contour (a bustle), the material around the characters that gives their words shape. If sincerity is, as Lionel Trilling has it, the "congruence between avowal and actual feeling," then character manner is the site where the gap between avowal and actual feeling can be observed and recorded, revealing the mechanisms by which candor is constructed (*Sincerity and Authenticity*, 2).[4] Consider a passage from *Oliver Twist* that excludes a key clause describing how the speech was spoken: "'Drat that beadle!' said Mrs. Mann, hearing the well-known shaking at the garden-gate. 'If it isn't him at this time in the morning! Lauk, Mr. Bumble, only think of its being you! Well, dear me, it *is* a pleasure, this is! Come into the parlour, sir, please.' / The first sentence was addressed to Susan; and the exclamations of delight were uttered to Mr. Bumble: as the good lady unlocked the garden-gate: and shewed him, with great attention and respect, into the house" (130).The joke in this passage pertains to Mrs. Mann's unblushing insincerity, and it is made possible by a rearrangement of the way character speech is usually represented in the novel. A single speech is conventionally understood to be delivered to the same auditor unless the text notes otherwise: for comic effect, this passage delays the description of how, or to whom, Mrs. Mann spoke. This passage is thus also a joke about both the moral and technical aspects of representing character. Mrs. Mann's two faces are clear from her words alone ("Drat that beadle. . . . Well, dear me, it *is* a pleasure"), but they become even clearer in the explication of her manner in the following paragraph. The "gap" between them is visible here as a space between paragraphs. One thinks here of Ivan Kreilkamp's argument that "shorthand, by apparently rendering writing directly mimetic of human speech, seems to imbue this writing with the very breath of the human," and yet even such "speech on paper" cannot be captured in writing (*Voice and the Victorian Storyteller*, 73). I argue here that explications of manner like this one—elaborate descriptions of how each statement is delivered that help make sense of what characters say—are of particular interest to the problem of rep-

resenting embodied voice, to the problem, to invoke Kreilkamp again, of how Dickens can and cannot control his own image as a storyteller. Within the novels, explication of manners reveals something important about how sincerity manifests in Dickens. Little is added to a first reading of the following passage from *Nicholas Nickleby* by laying out its narrative context: it is a self-standing moral comedy, in miniature. And the comedy is based on the interplay of speeches and the material that surrounds them:

> "Don't be cross, Fanny," said Miss Price. "I have come to tell you something that I know will please you."
>
> "What may that be, 'Tilda?" demanded Miss Squeers; screwing up her lips, and looking as if nothing in earth, air, fire, or water, could afford her the slightest gleam of satisfaction.
>
> "This," rejoined Miss Price. "After we left here last night, John and I had a dreadful quarrel."
>
> "That doesn't please me," said Miss Squeers—relaxing into a smile though.
>
> "Lor! I wouldn't think so bad of you as to suppose it did," rejoined her companion. "That's not it."
>
> "Oh!" said Miss Squeers, relapsing into melancholy. "Go on." (95)

Miss Squeers does not betray herself by her brief statements ("What may that be?," "That doesn't please me," "Oh! Go on") but by a series of excessively legible expressions rendered into the florid prose as part of the dialogue. We infer that she is indeed pleased when her face relaxes into a smile, and her "badness" is thrown into relief by Miss Price's ingenuous comment that "I wouldn't think so bad of you" as to suspect Miss Squeers would be pleased by the news of a fight. Manner serves as an index of sincerity as defined by Trilling—a "congruence between avowal and actual feeling"— whether it "matches" character speech or betrays it. There is something analogous about the clear congruity of avowal and feeling in a character like Miss Price and the clear *incongruity* of avowal and feeling in Mrs. Mann or Miss Squeers. The melodramatic tradition—in which gestures are perfectly expressive of the true self—inheres in both.

Inscrutability stems from the problem of interpretation, from the possibility of failing to read correctly and, of course, from characters deliberately deceiving one another. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, deception goes by the name of "honest composure." In the first major confrontation between Nicholas and his uncle Ralph, Ralph makes a false case against Nicholas before his mother and sister. Against a (rare) narrative description of Ralph's secret glee, his tones

and expressions are unrevealing. He speaks only "quietly," "motioning toward [Mrs. Nickleby], "turning to Mrs. Nickleby," "appealing to the mother again" (325–25).[5] Ralph's control over his manner is opposed not only to Nicholas's legibility but also to his sister Kate's. When Mrs. Nickleby defends her son only weakly, Kate lashes out:

> "Why do you say '*if* Nicholas has done what they say he has,' mama?" asked Kate, with honest anger. "You know he has not."
>
> "I don't know what to think, one way or another, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby; "Nicholas is so violent, and your uncle has so much honest composure, that I can only hear what he says, and not what Nicholas does." (326)

This exchange foregrounds the problem that "honesty" can be made legible to a reader in a way unavailable to an observer. Kate's "honest anger" is sincere, good; the adjectival qualification describes her motivation as if it were only a description of her speaking style. The "honest composure" Mrs. Nickleby ascribes to Ralph, on the other hand, collapses ethical intention into social manner. Her inability to read Ralph introduces the third term of interpretation to the problem Trilling describes, following Polonius, as inner self and outer show. The outer show of composure introduces an element of consciousness that compromises a notion of sincerity based on the simple congruity between avowal and desire. In the hierarchy of sincerity signals sketched by Roland Barthes—"in which sounds (a cry, an exclamation) are more trustworthy than words, aspect more than sounds"—nothing beats expression (*S/Z*, 169). Juliet John connects such sincerity in Dickens with melodrama: "As melodrama recommends a model of identity diametrically opposed to the modern psychoanalytic or intellectual subject, any character leading, or even possessing, a private, inner life is frequently a villain" (*Dickens's Villains*, 33). Speaking or acting "thoughtfully" suggests some static between what a character desires and expresses or does. Though not in itself bad, thoughtfulness is at odds with an ideal of sincerity manifested by expressivity.[6]

Character legibility is thus a moral problem (how to read characters from the outside) as well as a representational one (how to depict character from the outside). Brian Rosenberg observes that "Dickens re-creates the difficulty and indecision with which we apprehend people more than the contours of the people themselves" (*Little Dorrit's Shadows*, 25). Rosenberg attributes an upward swing in Dickens's critical fortune to a rise in critical values like dividedness and ambivalence that displaced the earlier premium put on psy-

chological intelligibility in—to take the great example—Henry James.[7] Henry James is particularly interesting here because of his doubled connection to the representation of interiority and theater—and because of a particular moment in *The Awkward Age*. I borrow the term "psychological intelligibility" from David Kurnick's illuminating discussion of how James's posttheatrical novels challenge that ideal. Kurnick argues that scenes of "talk" in *The Awkward Age* promise relief from a "dispiriting triumph of psychological intelligibility" by moving toward a "social formation that could protect a collective impenetrability to psychological knowingness" (*Empty Houses*, 111). By refusing to depict interiority, the novel also seeks to evade "the demand to be oneself on which sexual identity is based" (111).

The idea of speech tags as moral technology is particularly suggestive in a novel because, even as the speech tag refuses internal portraiture, it still uses the description of character speech to signal the quality of simplicity. Consider, for example, how much we learn about Nanda's character (as distinct from her mind) in *The Awkward Age*, a novel that renounces the privilege of psychological analysis in favor of an ostensibly external or theatrical description, in the following description of *how* she spoke and how she stopped speaking: "She stopped short, with the sense apparently that she was saying more than she meant, though, strangely, as if it had been an effect of her type and her voice, there was neither pertness nor passion in the profession she had just made. Curiously wanting as she seemed both in timidity and in levity, she was to a certainty not self-conscious—she was extraordinarily simple" (91). Nanda has only "apparently" the sense that she had said too much; she lacks "pertness and passion" in her speech "*as if* it had been an effect of her type or voice"; she only "seems" to be wanting in timidity and in levity. Against these provisional observations on what is apparently true, the passage asserts that she does not exhibit pertness, passion, or self-consciousness but that she is "extraordinarily" simple, and "to a certainty" not self-conscious. The representation of simplicity depends, here, on a combination of externalized description and ethical assertion fundamentally at odds with self-reflection—and also with psychological portraiture. The major question under discussion here is what Nanda knows: insofar as she is legible, it's through the combination of her speech and manner of speaking. Theatrically stylized dialogue is an ethical tool that makes character transparent—or opaque—in farcical, pathetic, satirical permutations. Here, James rejects the novel's technologies of psychological portraiture and narrative commentary, appealing instead to theater and gradually adapting a

style of dramatic representation for use in the novel in a strange amalgam of speech and manner, which distributes interpretive attention between speech and narrative framework.

In his computational study of Dickens's style, Masahiro Hori establishes that Dickens uses the word "thoughtfully" nearly nine times as often as other Victorian novelists and that it "may thus be considered Dickens' favourite manner adverb" (*Investigating Dickens' Style*, 47).[8] To speak or look—or even stand or sit or warm one's boots thoughtfully (as Inspector Bucket does [*Bleak House*, 868]) indicates the fact of reflection but not the kind. As John's work would lead us to expect, many of the plotting villains speak, watch, or act "thoughtfully"— Fagin in *Oliver Twist* (360, 361), Ralph Nickleby in *Nicholas Nickleby* (581), James Steerforth in *David Copperfield* (325), Blandois / Rigaud in *Little Dorrit* (349), and Silas Wegg in *Our Mutual Friend* (486). To read "interiority" through the marker of "thoughtfulness" makes something suddenly obvious: the direct connection between such villains and the many virtuous characters who (especially in the later novels) have much to conceal. John Jarndyce, Esther Summerson, Arthur Clennam, Little Dorrit, John Harmon, even David Copperfield's Agnes are "thoughtful" characters who demonstrate that such representational coyness is not limited to bad characters. As young David Copperfield continues reading after asking Peggotty about second marriages, she "was thoughtfully sticking her needle into various parts of her face and arms, all the time" (30). When it looks like Mr. Boffin is starting to go to the bad in *Our Mutual Friend*, Mrs. Boffin speaks, "thoughtfully pausing in her work" (458). Lizzie Hexam repeatedly speaks and looks thoughtfully (341, 343, 59), as does Bella after she begins to reform (511, 649, 664, 755).[9] Their manners of speaking signal repressed feeling rather than giving direct access to that feeling. The perspective on them is knowing, but not all-knowing—suggestive, but not explicit.

Dickens's resistance to spelling things out clarifies the difference between narrative omniscience and what we might think of, with Rosemarie Bodenheimer, as knowingness.[10] Bodenheimer cites a letter from Dickens to Wilkie Collins critiquing the narrators of the *Woman in White* for their habit of analysis:

> I seem to have noticed, here and there, that the great pains you take express themselves a trifle too much, and you know I always contest your disposition to give an audience credit for nothing—which necessarily involves the forcing of points upon their attention—and which I have always observed them to resent when they

> find it out—as they always will and do. Perhaps I express my meaning best when I say that the three people who write the narratives in these proofs have a Dissective property in common, which is essentially not theirs but yours; and that my own effort would be to strike more of what is got, *that way,* out of them by collision with one another, and by the working of the story. (*The Letters of Charles Dickens*, 194–95)

The moral and psychological explication ("what is got, *that way*") done by Collins's narrators should be suggested by character "collision"—which might look very much like the scenes from *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Oliver Twist* that I have discussed. That is, narrated dialogue can be understood as narrative commentary masquerading as description. Bodenheimer connects Dickens's representation of dialogue to his heavy hinting:

> It would be difficult to find a reader who did not feel that points had been forced—and repeatedly forced—by many of his narratives. But it is worth taking his assertions seriously, because they gesture toward aspects of his art that are particularly difficult to talk about. The image of characters acting upon or colliding with each other gives a central importance to the impact of dialogue. (*Knowing Dickens*, 22)

Bodenheimer connects the "forcing of points"—the moral obviousness or simplicity of which Dickens stood accused in the nineteenth century as well as the twentieth—with his presentation of character through dialogue. However, the kind of emphasis that depends on implication rather than explication creates room for real confusion or, alternatively, interpretation.

The difficulty of reading characters in Dickens is central to two recent accounts of fellow feeling in Victorian fiction that emphasize the distance between people: Rebecca Mitchell's work on empathy and Rae Greiner's on sympathy. In Mitchell's figuration, empathy "happens" between readers and characters: readers, who have total access to characters represented in visual or textual art, learn to "read" real others by watching the characters fail and then learn to empathize with one another (*Victorian Lessons*, 21).[11] Mitchell argues that we ought to keep in mind "the ways that prose fiction and paintings are *not* like persons" and therefore turns to scenes of literacy and learning (21). In a sense, this chapter is a reductive version of her thematic reading. My study asks what literary people are made of and how we come to know them; its exploration of perspective is thus grounded in the representational techniques of showing

characters in dialogue at the level of the line. My focus on dialogue aligns my work more closely with Greiner's, which approaches the difficulty of reading character in Dickens through scenes in which characters find themselves unable to speak. For Greiner, the impossibility of knowing others creates a process of "reconstructing other minds from the partial evidence of the sounds people make, words caught in the back of the throat, neither uttered nor entirely swallowed back"; in turn "we feel called upon to perform a kind of textual Heimlich maneuver, forcing up what cannot on its own be coughed out" (*Sympathetic Realism*, 95, 96).[12] If Greiner's focus is on our sympathetic response, mine is on the larger problem of "partial evidence": what representational facts are we responding to—or judging by? Reducing the scope of inquiry to the interplay between speech and narration in dialogue makes it possible to track the critical and ethical questions Greiner poses across Dickens's novels. In its avoidance of direct or explicit statements, the aesthetic of ostension—simple, obvious, emphatic—that partially motivates such evasively narrated dialogue also gives that dialogue an undercurrent of the ineffable.

Sincerity, Authenticity and Speech Tags

Speech tags are a crucial element of what we're used to thinking of as Dickens's theatrical style, but it makes sense to remember how elaborately written they are. Reporting clauses add emphasis to a remarkable dialogue; their role is sometimes subtle and often pivotal. They add emphasis not only in the *OED*'s most usual sense of "vigour and intensity of statement or impression" but in the rhetorical sense, the "use of language in such a way as to imply more than is actually said; a meaning not inherent in the words used, but conveyed by implication." Dickens's narration is often characterized by a kind of emphatic hint, an elaborate refusal to state the obvious. In the following passage from *Nicholas Nickleby*, Mr. Squeers, who runs a school for unwanted boys, lists the luggage Snawley's stepsons are required to bring, concluding with a razor.

> "A razor!" exclaimed Mr. Snawley, as they walked into the next box. "What for?"
>
> "To shave with," replied Squeers, in a slow and measured tone.
>
> There was not much in these three words, but there must have been something in the manner in which they were said, to attract attention, for the schoolmaster and his companion looked steadily at each other for a few seconds, and then exchanged a very meaning smile. (95)

"There was not much in these three words"—though of course there is—"but there must have been something in the manner in which they were said." The narrative avoids direct explication of what is a fairly straightforward proposition (something to the effect that little boys must bring razors because they will be away at Squeers's school until they are men). This deliberately evasive language gives way to a "very" meaning smile, which could hardly be less specific or, in another sense, more clear.[13] Even without the subsequent nudge, the ostensibly neutral information that Squeers spoke in a "slow and measured tone" is suggestive of unspoken meaning—it is a note to pay attention to the speech.

Speech tags offer what other forms of moralized characterization (which, in Dickens, includes appearance, names, and actions—and even speech alone) do not: a flexible relation between character speech and character manner in which words might be taken at face value or, alternatively, *read through*. Legibility is inherent in the metaphor of "reading" character expression, and I make the distinction to suggest a more penetrating understanding of character interiority than would be available from a purely physical description. That is, material around dialogue does not make characters *visible*, or (in Cohn's phrase) transparent; it makes them—to a greater or lesser degree—legible.[14] Martin Puchner sketches out a spectrum of "legibility" in theater that runs from the straightforwardly legible characters in a melodrama to the inscrutable characters of modern drama. Puchner argues that complex stage directions developed as a reaction against theatricality and especially against the person of the actor. Modernists attempted to introduce diegesis into theater: "The growing importance of stage directions reaches one climax in Beckett's stage directions, not because they are particularly long . . . but because they enfold a universe parallel to, and thus at all times competing with, the drama of speech" (*Stage Fright*, 26). Dickens's speech tags anticipate this movement, calling attention to their own writtenness.

When the logic of melodramatic legibility breaks down, as it often does in *Bleak House*, the careful description of a character's manner of speaking only emphasizes the unknowability of his intentions. The oblique representation of character through narrated dialogue is particularly revealing in the first-person narratives: above all, in Esther Summerson's narrative in *Bleak House*. Her role as a guide in that novel is often understood to be compromised (or, by some accounts, solidified) by the contrast between third-person omniscience and her comparatively limited ethical perspective. Bruce Robbins has argued that Esther's narrative cannot encompass the sociopolitical concerns of the

third-person narrative ("Telescopic Philanthropy"), while Amanda Anderson argues that there is a "too-stark opposition between a detached critical lucidity condemned to a state of exile and an affirmation of modest duty afflicted by the needful myopia of cultivated affiliations" created by the novel's "self-divisions" (*Powers of Distance*, 89). Distance is, of course, a relative problem: in *Reaping Something New*, Daniel Hack reveals how scalable (and exportable) "localism" is in *Bleak House*.[15] I approach the opposition between localized ethical investments and systemic perspective in *Bleak House* not by taking up the opposition between its two narrative styles but by showing how the "value and dangers of habitual wariness" described by Anderson and invoked by Bodenheimer play out at the level of the scene, even within a sentence of dialogue.

Esther's manner of representing scenes is an extension of a pattern of dialogue that characterizes the earlier novels, which is to say, a pattern in which the narrated dialogue uses a character's "manner of speaking" as a counterpoint to character speech. In *Bleak House*, Esther herself is often accused of insincerity. Dickens's friend and biographer John Forster considered Esther's narrative a failure in part because it *exhibited* his "marvellous power over the real":

> To represent a storyteller as giving the most surprising vividness to manners, motives, and characters of which we are to believe her, all the time, as artlessly unconscious, as she is also entirely ignorant of the good qualities in herself she is naïvely revealing in the story, was a difficult enterprise, full of hazard in any case, not worth success, and certainly not successful. Ingenuity is more apparent than freshness, the invention is neither easy nor unstrained, and though the old marvellous power over the real is again abundantly manifest, there is some alloy of the artificial. (*Life of Charles Dickens*, 2:138)

I follow Forster in emphasizing continuity in the representation of "manners, motives, and characters" between Esther's narrative and the other novels. Audrey Jaffe considers Esther's coyness as an effect of narrative positioning and argues that Esther emphasizes her innocence because of her compromised position as an illegitimate daughter. Coyness is inherent in the quasi-dramatic mode of character presentation—stage directions often approach character obliquely—but it reads most clearly as coyness when it is gendered female. In the following passage, Esther is about to be put in a very tricky position—her guardian, on whom she's entirely dependent and whom the novel has previously suggested might be her father, is asking permission to send her a letter that proposes marriage.

> "Then see, my love," said he with his cheery smile, "am I at this moment quite as plain and easy—do I seem as open, as honest and old-fashioned—as I am at any time?"
>
> I answered in all earnestness, "Quite." With the strictest truth, for his momentary hesitation was gone (it had not lasted a minute), and his fine, sensible, cordial, sterling manner was restored.
>
> "Do I look as if I suppressed anything, meant anything but what I said, had any reservation at all, no matter what?" said he with his bright clear eyes on mine. I answered, most assuredly he did not.
>
> "Can you fully trust me, and thoroughly rely on what I profess, Esther?"
>
> "Most thoroughly," said I with my whole heart.
>
> "My dear girl," returned my guardian, "give me your hand." (688–89)

This is a rare scene in which Esther expands many of her own reporting clauses—not with physical detail but with assertions of her perfect sincerity: she speaks "in all earnestness," "with her whole heart"—even, in a delayed reporting clause, "with the strictest truth." These clauses read like stage directions—except that in them the character attributes sincerity to herself, which is so often an ominous sign. It is not only the embodied first person that makes this passage unconvincing but the subsequent modification suggesting a lack of perfect frankness in Jarndyce: "His hesitation was gone (it had not lasted a minute)." In the first passage I cited from *Oliver Twist*, the effect of the delayed description of manner points up the unnaturalness of conventions for writing speech, but the effect is basically comic. Esther's choice to delay narrating Jarndyce's hesitation suggests a measure of self-consciousness incompatible with sincerity. By pretending that the novel can communicate visually or dramatically, novelists may make the ethical judgments of characters seem self-evident—as if the characters show their true selves through their manner rather than through speech or even through their thoughts (because, remember, Dickens's characters don't think—they look and speak "thoughtfully"). I argue that speech tags that give us some blend of external and internal description of character force us to rethink the notion of direct discourse.

Rethinking Direct Discourse

Speech tags are a strategically partial way to look at Dickens, one connected with how the characters are represented in relation to one another. Let me

acknowledge here that it *is* a partial look and that there is something reductive in my insistence that we ignore—or at least reframe the way we attend to—speech, which is maybe the best part of reading Dickens. Moreover, Dickens's character speeches have a vibrant critical history of their own, through "mechanical" repetition, dialect, idiolects, and the dynamics of turn taking.[16] The fact that there is a relation between speech tags and speech and that I turn away from the latter underlines the "reductive" part of reductive reading. The shift in attention I propose from one element of dialogue to another is not so much a corrective as a counterposition; a shift of attention from direct discourse to the material just around it. Why do this?

In Dickens, considering the narrative material around dialogue as part of the dialogue—that is, taking into account not simply what characters say but how they say it—reveals how the construction of character novelizes theatricality. It also suggests that speech tags have an extraordinarily important role to play in Dickens's work and gives us a feature concrete enough to take a distant look at how they work across a (much) broader range of texts. To allegorize my larger method: the point of reductive reading is to transform intellectual and literary inquiry by simplifying a complex problem in order to understand it better. What does dialogue in Dickens suggest about dialogue in a broader nineteenth-century context? In addition to using my own approach here, I also draw on the work of a predecessor: Mark Lambert's 1981 *Dickens and the Suspended Quotation*, a brilliant Freudian reading (and statistical study!) of a certain kind of speech tag. This book brings together a hunch about Dickens, advice from a statistician, and, crucially here, as a model of reductive reading, a generative definition.

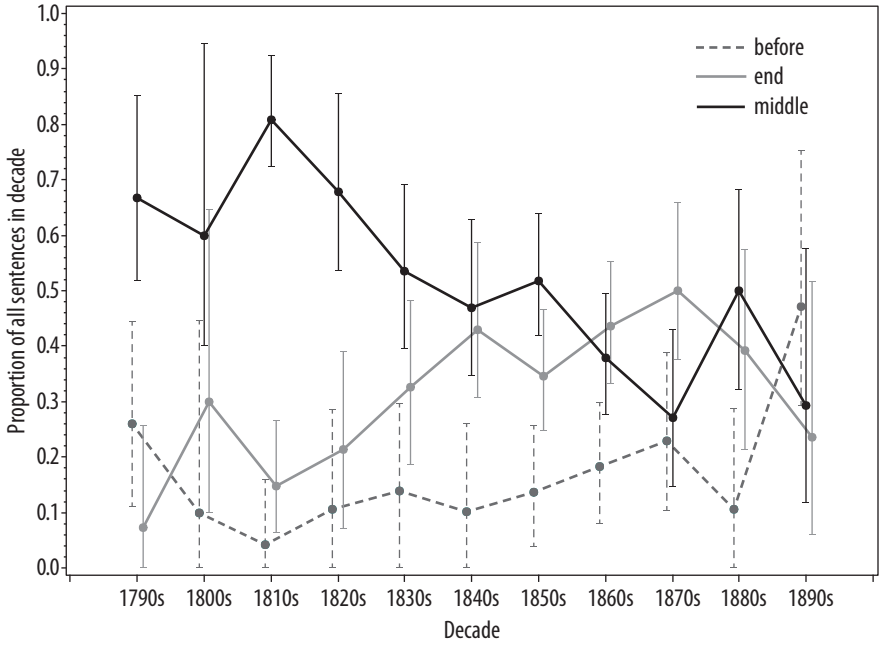
The hunch: against the dominant impression that Dickens's dialogue is essentially dramatized rather than narrated, Lambert argues that the stage directions assert themselves in the person of the author, who *interrupts* a character: "And we do need to feel that it this is truly the writer, not a 'ghostly' narrator" ("Three Matters of Style," 698). That is, Lambert argues that the "suspended quotations" he tracks are the comments of a jealous author interrupting the speeches of his beloved characters. Lambert's statistical consultant helped him design a survey of quotation practices in early and late Dickens relative to a selection of other nineteenth-century novels that focused on the "suspended quotation," or how many times a reporting clause was expanded in the middle of a speech by five or more words (*Dickens and the Suspended Quotation*, 6).[17] One of Lambert's choicest examples comes from *Martin Chuzzlewit*: "And how,' *said Mr. Peck-*

sniff, drawing off his gloves and warming his hands before the fire, as benevolently as if they were someone else's, not his, 'And how is he now?" (43, my emphasis).[18] The results of Lambert's survey reveal that Dickens uses the suspended quotation far more often than most of his contemporaries, that he is less likely than his contemporaries to mark dialogue by punctuation only (that is, not even tagging speech with a simple reporting clause of "he / she said"), and that, considering suspensions and untagged quotations together, "officiousness" falls off in the novels from *Bleak House* on.[19]

In 2012, Michaela Mahlberg and Catherine Smith checked Dickens's entire corpus for suspended quotations and concluded, more or less, that Lambert was right: "Although the figures are not exactly the same there is very little difference in the overall ranking of the books and the early-late distinction is largely maintained" ("Dickens, the Suspended Quotation and the Corpus," 56). They also found that word "pause" occurred significantly more often in suspensions than would be expected given its general frequency (63). That is, the suspension "interrupts" a speech to create the pause it describes. This is beautiful; this is pacing. What happens when we return from the careful studies of Dickens's style as they emerge from the texts alone to our starting point, the formal question about the emergence of character through narrative? Having established the special significance of speech tags within narrated dialogue, I have "reduced" the problem to speech tags and to two specific questions about speech tags: length and placement.

To study speech tags and dialogue is to consider speech as a proxy for "showing" and speech tags a proxy for "telling." This radically simplistic typographical distinction is the basis of what follows—again, my gamble is that the results are interesting because speech tags shed light on a major aesthetic and ethical narrative problem: how people are represented in fiction. The statistical analysis was done by Anna Moseley; Stewart Sinclair and Meredith Summit provided research assistance in tagging sentences and reviewing literature. We conducted a study on the mechanics of representing how characters speak in the nineteenth-century novel. By "the nineteenth-century novel," I mean over two hundred English and Irish novels drawn from the Chadwyck-Healey database; the random sample includes over four hundred sentences that pull together quoted material and unquoted material.[20]

We know rather a lot about the subtle patterns of representing character consciousness in a few major novels, but what do the "obvious" patterns of representing character across a corpus help us see?[21] All the speeches we looked at



The fall of the medial speech tag: proportion of sentence type by decade

included tags, so we checked placement: did the inquit come at the beginning, in the middle—like the suspended quotation—or at the end? Moseley found that year was significantly associated with placement of speech tags even when accounting for differences between authors ($p = 0.007$).[22] We can see this trend in the preceding figure, which shows the observed proportion of each sentence type by decade.[23]

It turns out that medial speech tags begin the century as the predominant form of tagging character speech and then fall: they end it as one choice among three. If, by the twentieth century, the most typical place to tag a clause in fiction is at the end, our study shows that the most typical place in the first half of the nineteenth-century novel is in the middle. An account of this phenomenon might begin with the findings of a study of style across genres from the seventeenth century to the present, which suggests that English has tended over time to "drift" toward more oral styles, or styles that are "more involved, less elaborated, and less abstract" (Biber and Finegan, "Drift and the Evolution of English Style," 487). Here, the medial speech tag enhances the rhetorical effect

of a sentence instead of breaking into it. Consider these two sentences from the last decade of the eighteenth century, in which it seems like the medial speech tag has been placed to accentuate the formal flow of the speech, the first from Anne Radcliffe's *The Sicilian* (1790) and the second from Mary Robinson's *Walsingham; or, The Pupil of Nature* (1797):

> "Fly," *said he*, "from the authority of a father who abuses his power, and assert the liberty of choice, which nature assigned you." (140)

> "Then I must await that period," *said I firmly*: "I have too long been the victim of appearances; it is time that the sombre shadow should be dissolved by the penetrating rays of truth; life has been a weary journey, and the sooner it is over the better." (my emphasis, 454)

The medial speech tag here accentuates speeches that are not notably close to regular speech. If characters generally come to sound more like people in the nineteenth century, speech tag placement is a way to see how characters become so distinct from the narrative material that by the middle of the century it is possible for one (in Lambert's formulation) to "interrupt" the other. That is, perhaps medial speech tags become less dominant once they come to feel more visible. In this context, Dickens's suspended speech tags buck a trend toward tagging speech at the end—and, as they do so, they seem to insist, in their expansiveness, on their writtenness. They emphasize a narrative distance from characters by providing an interpretive filter on character speech.

To shift from a study of tournure in Dickens to an argument about speech tags in the nineteenth-century novel transforms the target of analysis from moralized character in Dickens to one of the major formal and aesthetic shifts in the nineteenth century: the tendency to let characters speak for themselves. The fall of medial speech tags suggests that we might consider the emergence of "three-dimensional" characters in the nineteenth century not only in terms, as Cohn suggests, of our increasing intimacy with their internal perspectives or, as Alex Woloch suggests, by their relation to "flattened" two-dimensional characters but also by an increasingly externalized perception of character that works in opposition to the more person-like figure of the narrator.[24] To pull the two parts of this discussion together, then: Dickens uses "suspended quotations" along with other signals that primarily work to interpret character speeches. This inscribes a skeptical moral perspective into what ostensibly feels like external description. The medial speech tag, however, looks *backward*

instead of forward. The perspective taking on character begins to coalesce into something more like a person, but it is grounded in a time when the tagging of speech was (I have suggested) less visible. In this context, the chief innovation of Dickensian dialogue is a narrator personalized *not* by the club he sits in while he tells the story but by his written engagement with the characters on the page. The descriptions of manner don't signal omniscience—our perception of Mrs. Mann or Squeers is knowing, but it is not all-knowing. Once it starts to feel like characters are people speaking, a speech tag feels like an interruption—or, conversely, like someone telling the story is interrupting someone inside the story.

Bleak House after Speech Tags

As we return to Dickens, then, it should be in the broader context of the emergence of the narrator as a figure who is, by the end of the century, less likely to "interrupt." If the purpose of this speech tag is connected with the interpretive work narration does throughout his dialogue, the personalization of the narrated dialogue is most clear in *Bleak House* because of all Dickens's first-person narrators, Esther is the one under the most pressure to let the story speak for itself. Her innocence, it seems, ought to preclude her from getting wise to the shenanigans of the people around her. Let me preface my return to her narrative with two more facts from Hori. First, all Dickens's "I-narrators" use fewer manner adverbs to describe their own direct speech than the speeches of others, but Esther does it less than Pip and far less than David Copperfield, preferring simply to say "I said" or "said I." In fact, of all Esther's directly quoted speeches, "I said" appears with a manner adverb only three times out of three hundred (*Investigating Dickens' Style*, 47).[25] Esther's interiority is communicated by some of the same evasive signals as are Dickens's earlier third-person narrators. By contrast, she habitually uses speech tags to signal judgment indirectly—Richard's destruction by Jarndyce and Jarndyce can be tracked through them, for example—but her clauses reporting the speech of the criminally careless Mr. Skimpole occur medially 81 percent of the time—more than anyone else's (140).

Harold Skimpole poses a threat to sincerity because he is exactly what he claims to be, though not in so many words: perfectly selfish.[26] When Esther implies that she has her doubts about Skimpole, she concludes with the ambivalent assertion that he is at least consistent: "What he was to my guardian he cer-

tainly was to the rest of the world" (239). From Skimpole's first appearance, he speaks "in the frankest manner," "in the same light way," "buoyantly," "with his agreeable candor," "smiling," "gaily, innocently, and confidingly, as he looked at his drawing with his head on one side" (90–97). The superlative frankness and the tripled manner adverbs ("gaily, innocently, confidingly") seem overdone from the outset. By chapter 43, when Esther speaks to him about his role in helping to ruin young Richard, the speech tags emphasize a sameness of manner in increasingly strong contrast to the substance of the conversation:

> I delicately said, that there was a responsibility in encouraging Richard.
>
> "Responsibility, my dear Miss Summerson," he repeated, catching at the word with the pleasantest smile, "I am the last man in the world for such a thing. I never was responsible in my life—I can't be."
>
> "I am afraid everybody is obliged to be," said I, timidly enough: he being so much older and more clever than I.
>
> "No, really," said Mr. Skimpole, receiving this new light with a most agreeable jocularity of surprise. (603)

Esther's self-deprecating comment—"he being so much older and more clever than I" gives her usual irony an unnervingly explicit suggestion of false innocence. The two manner adverbs Esther attributes to herself—"delicately" and "timidly"—assert hesitation, even though her speech—"I'm afraid everybody is obliged to be"—is as programmatic a pronouncement as you'll find anywhere in *Bleak House*. Perhaps the simplest reason for Esther's failure to convince many readers of her sincerity lies in having no one else to ascribe it to her. When describing Skimpole's manner, Esther seems to write what she sees, and what she writes suggests—though only by strong implication—what she thinks. The element of ethical judgment that always resided in the reporting clauses becomes obvious when the narrative perspective is personalized through Esther Summerson's overdetermined "little body."

One surprising consequence of focusing on dialogue in *Bleak House* is that the problems with interpretation in that novel become focused on relations between characters. This is a twist to two major accounts of interpretation in *Bleak House*: J. Hillis Miller's introduction to the 1971 Penguin, which names it the great document about the interpretation of documents, and D. A. Miller's treatment of Inspector Bucket as a figure for the everywhereness of power. My claim that moral judgment works obliquely in Dickens is counterintuitive because his characters are notoriously legible. Narrated dialogue reveals

a paradox of style and effect by showing how very often "legibility" is constructed indirectly or ironically. The generic translation of stage directions into expanded reporting clauses makes it possible to pose reading sincerity as a moral problem by creating an active tension between character speech, action, and "legible" physical expression. A focused examination of narrated dialogue reveals that the frequent descriptions of character manner, tone, gesture, and expression emphasize the difference between looking at a character and reading that character in order to make her legible rather than simply visible. One important consequence of my focus on speech tags is that we see that immediacy, which one tends to associate with a focalized narrative perspective, looking *with* a central character, is here achieved by a fully external perspective on character: That is, "immediacy" comes from reading through a character's words.

The novels of Dickens stage a reflexive contrast between speech and manner that is habitual enough that its relative rarity in Esther's narrative is a notable part of what is missing from her characterization: its absence becomes one way of staging her self-effacement that becomes its own evidence of her refusal to avow moral judgment not only of Skimpole but of Jarndyce. What is interesting here is how one kind of modified clause—a speech tag—always works (by virtue of its being a speech tag) to provide complementary information about the speech act. There can be an extremely wide range of how much and what kind of information is given. Lambert's "aggressive" interrupting clauses are an example of a kind of stylistic egregiousness; what you get in any case, however, is a linguistic construction of a pattern of apprehension.

Much of the contemporary criticism around the ethical work novels do considers reading as a relation between the reader and either the characters or narrator. I contextualize the decline in the use of medial speech tags to a broader shift in literary style toward a more casual "oral" style traced by historical linguists, as well as to literary-critical accounts of the emerging assumption that fictional characters are like real people. By contrasting Lambert's reading of Dickens's suspended quotations (fundamentally an argument about Dickens's psychology) in the broader context of how inquits change in the nineteenth-century Anglo-British novel and by focusing so closely on what seems to be an idiosyncrasy of style characteristic of an individual author, I simultaneously try to keep one eye on larger conventions. I began, in thinking about the importance of the author to literary stylistics in particular, by contrasting style as signature and style as fingerprint; in context of broader conventions of represent-

ing fictional persons, the proxies I have laid out here could well be of interest to related questions about, say, representativity and the use of commentative clauses in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or about reading character in *Daniel Deronda*, in which most of the information in the first dialogue between Gwendolyn Harleth and Harcourt is a description of how Gwendolyn—and only how Gwendolyn—"filled up" the pauses between their speeches, a characteristically Dickensian thing to represent. I've chosen the patterns here because they seemed to "stand in for" something characteristic about an author, the texts, the ethical project of fiction, and yet they might do similar structural work in other authors and texts—to a different effect.

A Grammar of Perception

Authors, I have suggested, use syntactic structures to shape not only characters but readers. What I have called a study of moralizing style works at the level of syntax. In this respect, it is part of the recent development of what we might think of as a new ethics of syntax, examinations of how the grammar of representation might structure an ethical relation between reader and text. Andrew H. Miller has described the optative mood as a site of longing, of reflection on lives unled.[1] In Miller's work, such moments prompt the reader to self-reflection through an encounter with another. Dorothy Hale connects Judith Butler's reading of "as it were," which "opens up semantic ambiguities that result in irresolvable ethical questions," with the "as if" posture suggested by Wayne Booth's implied reader, one whose "self-projection is in fact limited by the voluntary self-binding undertaken by the reader who responds positively to the text's hailing" ("Fiction as Self-Restriction," 198, 199).[2] For Hale, the recognition of alterity is perceptible at the level of the pattern of grammatical distance. Both Hale and Miller connect a grammatical mode with its linguistic function. The specific elements of style I have studied here underline the continuous process of perception (as in Miller) and the reader's mode of apprehending others (as

in Hale). This morally infused language aims less to foster a reader's sympathy than to cultivate a reader's self-conscious detachment. Amanda Anderson's *Powers of Distance* and *The Way We Argue Now* argue for the value of lines of thinking that emphasize a continual struggle to transcend one's own embeddedness. The syntactic clauses I have examined here comprise a little toolbox for thinking critically, skeptically, about others.

The focus on written structures of perception that I have pursued in this book directs attention away from the "people," and even the content, of what is being perceived. Grammatical patterns here shape reflexive judgments. In Eliot's novels, there is habit of pausing to describe a person or trait with an abstract descriptive clause; in Elizabeth Barrett Browning, of checking oneself and beginning anew; in Dickens, of tagging what someone has said with a note describing his manner or context. *Reductive Reading* asks what models of judgment operate through these patterns: how Eliot might evoke habitual recourse to conceptual abstraction, or Barrett Browning a prophetic mode that makes the present the only moment that counts, or Dickens a skeptical attentiveness to manner that exists uneasily within an ideal of sincerity.

These patterns in fiction, I have argued, comprise a morally freighted linguistic framework for perceiving others; something that works not through character or plot but through inscribed patterns of apprehension. This approach makes the textual construction of character extremely clear: fictional persons are persons only insofar as we encounter them textually, at the level of the sentence. The didacticism I propose finally resembles less an exemplary figure or sermon than a set of templates. Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein argue in their composition handbook *They Say/I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* that what novice writers need most to learn is the basic formulas for argumentation.[3] Such templates simplify the logical relation between sets of ideas that are in themselves extremely complex: "They say x, *but* I say y"; "they say x, *and* I agree *because*." Such patterns offer the writer (the reader of the handbook) a set of ways to situate him- or herself critically vis-à-vis the writing of others. They are surprisingly empty of content. But they are not content poor as abstractions are in Moretti's *Distant Reading* (49). They are to be filled with content: they are contagious formulas for putting language to the experience of encountering others.

What does it mean to "reduce" a novel not to plot or relations among characters or relations between the reader and with character but to templates of style that structure these relations? In considering how novels might shape

their own reception in a way that resists the personalized narrator, implied author, and figured character, I have drawn on a tenet from what Nicholas Dames has called physiological novel theory, which asks how the genre of the novel might have been shaped by the reading modes that characterize it. This tradition, for Dames, allows the physical reader to play a role in the cast of figures who usually structure the scene of reading (the personalized narrator, implied author, and figured character). If, for Roland Barthes, the birth of the reader comes at the cost of the death of the author, then for Dames (here follows a very loose paraphrase) the birth of novel theory as we know it came at the cost of a theory of novel reading.[4]

> What if the history of reading could be discovered not (solely) in records of individual reading acts—marginalia, journal reviews, histories of criticism, commonplace books, and autobiographies—but ossified in the very form of texts themselves, in the genetic code, so to speak, of genre itself, which evolves in a reciprocal relation with the reading modes they determine and are in turn determined by? (*The Physiology of the Novel*, 29)

Physiological theory restores "the peculiarities and specific features of consuming novels to its set of analytic categories." (29) One of the key modes Dames describes is "fragmentation," or a discontinuous reading experience, and his example is Vernon Lee's attempt, through computational analysis, "to understand how the 'units' of readerly comprehension became wholes" (174). Lee applies an idea of units of consciousness by hand-tagging novels, asking what mental attitudes the author imposes on the reader. Lee thus offers a nineteenth-century example of thinking about how one might "reduce" a novel. Against the singularity of the textual instant, I pose the problem of structural similarity, the "family resemblance" across sentences.[5]

Reductive Reading is a meditation on how recurring syntactic patterns, patterns that occur in the narrative matrix around dialogue and, occasionally, in the language of characters, might prompt certain kinds of attention. Dorrit Cohn describes a shift in aesthetic priorities in the nineteenth century: "With the growing interest in the problems of individual psychology, the audible narrator disappears from the fictional world. . . .[A] fully developed figural consciousness siphons away the emotional and intellectual energy formerly lodged in the expansive narrator" (*Transparent Minds*, 25). In what Cohn calls the "narrator-oriented" novels, "the inner life of an individual character becomes a sounding-board for general truths about human nature" (23). But here

is the beginning of *Daniel Deronda*, which opens in a kind of free indirect discourse focalized through Eliot's only character who manages to find a destiny great enough for his goodness: "Was she beautiful or not beautiful? and what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil; else why was the effect that of unrest rather than of undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as coercion and not as a longing *in which the whole being consents*?" (7, my emphasis). Deronda struggles with a problem the narrators of *Middlemarch* and *Emma* don't face: Was she beautiful or not beautiful? When Deronda sees something like beauty, he asks what it means—but he does so in a pattern established by the essayistic narrator of the novel. My contribution, finally, to the new ethics of syntax is an emphasis on the mental attitudes that the writer forces on the reader: the way that reading novels might, through recurrent patterns of language, provide formulas for perceiving, even judging, others.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION: On Choosing a Proxy for Style

1. Disciplines centered around subtle observations about human-made objects might be well served by my approach. Jennifer Summit defends humanistic study not because the books are great but because of the way we read them: For Summit, "the humanities exist as a disciplinary matrix because of the questions, methods, and practices that scholars bring to them in order to make those [human-made] objects legible and meaningful" ("Renaissance Humanism and the Future of the Humanities," 674). It is wise for those of us who do this work to develop forceful explanations for why we study the way we do.

2. The list goes on. Two especially interesting recent candidates are Nathan Hensley's "curatorial reading," a "reading-with," in *Forms of Empire* that calls for reading telegraphs as one would read poetry, as they present a certain way of perceiving the contradiction of the violence that underwrites the liberal state, and Daniel Shore's "plural reading" in "WWJD?" uses a collection of instances of syntactic forms, or resonant phrases, from an archive to understand how a phrase might resonate through time. Shore's reading is "reductive" in its initial phase, when he makes the case for tracing the expression "what would Jesus do?" as a proxy for the tradition of *imitatio Christi* or the emergence of "was it for this?" as a way to reconceptualize influence. Some key entrants in the reading debates include Richards, *Practical Criticism*, Miller, *Hidden Hitchcock*, Moretti, *Distant Reading*, Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, the special fall 2009 issue of *Representations* edited by Best and Marcus, *Between Women*, and Sedgwick, *Between Men* and *Touching Feeling*.

3. Nicholas Dames has argued persuasively for the significance of critical protocol: "One good way of categorizing a critical school or critical practice is to define the pitch, intensity, and duration of readerly attention that it employs and seeks to make normative" (*The Physiology of the Novel*, 13).

4. One way in which both works depict the "Real & Ideal" is in showing the failure of utilitarianism because it does not promote spiritual sustenance; *Hard Times* treats the "ideal" through the metaphor of the circus, a blend of "fancy" and sentiment while *Aurora Leigh* argues that the progress of human society depends on the art and idealism of the poet.

5. I follow common practice in referring to the poet as "Barrett Browning," but I note Marjorie Stone's observation that the initials "EBB" reflect the writer's "own practice and the continuity between her maiden and married identities" ("Elizabeth Barrett Browning," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*).

6. Jesse Rosenthal argues in *Good Form* that Victorians practiced an intuitionist moralized reading and that we do, too. Rosenthal emphasizes an abstract "sense of narrative necessity"

evident in, for example, the Bildungsroman plot, which he explicitly opposes to Meredith's moralizing, which presents "a moral argument that seems to be separate, or separable, from his artistic project" (4–5). I focus on how such seemingly separable elements of moralizing characterized by Rosenthal as "Eliot's occasional harangues and Meredith's overt erudition" might be imbricated in the fictional world through the well-rounded (perhaps too rounded, even distended) sentence (4).

7. For a good general introduction to this area of inquiry, see Phelan, "Narrative Ethics."

8. I emphasize here the tremendous responsibility inherent in Sartre's idea of style as a tool to communicate content because it echoes Victorian reviewers' demand for both moral clarity and subtlety. Let me also pause to recognize the complementary value of confusion, as Geoffrey Baker understands it in *Aesthetics of Clarity and Confusion*, in which the chief responsibility of literature is to challenge rationalist discourse. This latter tradition has recently blossomed into new formalisms. Caroline Levine, for one, argues in *Forms* that literary forms are complex structures, just like political and lived forms are. Nathan Hensley, for another, argues that the best expression of how "the world's first liberal democracy might have the threat of death coiled at its very heart" can be found not in essays of the typical proponents of "progressivist idealism and voluntarist rationalism" but in the writing of those who use "literary effects to accomplish conceptual operations that other modes of formalizing knowledge cannot" (*Forms of Empire*, 9, 22). And Anna Kornbluh emphasizes the importance of literary form in understanding how Victorian writers encountered capitalism: "To the historicist's reduction of literature to discourse, I oppose deconstruction's insistence on the irreducibility of tropes to intuitive ideas, and I work instead to encounter the material and process of literary thinking" (*Realizing Capital*, 13).

9. Methodologically, I am especially interested in moments in which a complicated, historically situated argument creates extraordinarily explicit criteria for evidence. For example, David Kurnick's *Empty Houses* "demetaphorizes" biographical and textual engagements with the theater. Against a critical history that tells us the novel is the great form of interiority (and that the more access you have to someone's psyche, the better), Kurnick opposes scenes of dialogue in the work of Henry James. In terms of grammatical approaches to complex ethical questions, we might consider the multiple readings of the use of the second person in nineteenth-century criticism and literature, which includes not only Miller's study of the narrative of exemplarity and moral perfectionism but also Adela Pinch's *Thinking about Other People*, which traces the interrelations among philosophy, psychology and literature to explore the implications of the belief that thinking about another person will affect them (for good or ill) and considers this belief through an exploration of poetry written in the second person, and Emily Harrington's *Second Person Singular*, in which the antiquated "thou" form figures a more general notion of a "poetics of impersonal intimacy" (although this book is focused more on temporality—narrative tense—than on the interrelation between two people).

10. Other examples of this trend include Daniel Tyler's edited collection *Dickens's Style* (2013), which explores a range of approaches, emphasizing the flexibility of the enterprise and the impressionism it seems to invite, Frederik Van Dam's recent full-length study of style in Trollope, and Melissa Raines's focus on the evolving grammar of successive drafts by Eliot, which she draws on to argue for the significance of syntax and the importance of textual history in a limited canon. I discuss nineteenth-century approaches to style in chapter 2, but see also Camlot, *Style and the Nineteenth-Century British Critic*, and Sussman, "Stylistic Virtue in the Nineteenth Century."

11. For example, Amanda Anderson's *Powers of Distance*, Andrew H. Miller's *Burdens of Perfection*, and Rae Greiner's *Sympathetic Realism* all consider how novels represent relations between people in terms of nineteenth-century thinking about (respectively) detachment, moral exemplarity, and sympathy. For recent studies of how nineteenth-century critics and reviewers thought about morals in the novel, see chapter 2.

12. Miller characterizes Austen's mode as "anonymous, impersonal, universal narration (usually called, after its least important feature, omniscient") (*Jane Austen,* 27).

13. See Snyder and Musu-Gillette, "Free or Reduced Price Lunch: A Proxy for Poverty?" and Chen and Nordhaus, "The Value of Luminosity Data as a Proxy for Economic Statistics."

14. Jim Frost calls the proxy the "good twin" of a confounding variable—if "confounding variables affect your results in undesirable ways by not being included in the model," then "proxy variables benefit your analysis" because you can account for them in your model ("Proxy Variables"). As Wikipedia points out, the proxy can correlate either positively or negatively with the variable you're interested in.

15. Burrows's Delta will give you a numerical representation of one author's difference from another author or authors. By contrast, an idea of style as signature suggests a deliberate, artistic voice with features that connect clearly to a distinctive project.

16. David Hoover's Zeta and Iota measure unusual words rather than common ones; they are something closer to a signature than a fingerprint. In characterizing late Henry James through medium- and low-frequency words, he uses those "characteristic vocabulary 'marker' words that one author uses consistently, but that another author or other authors use much less frequently or not at all" ("Corpus Stylistics, Stylometry, and the Styles of Henry James," 193). Put another way, his focus is on what is distinctive, authentic, or recognizable about James. Hoover's work on late James is interesting because it supports not only the idea, as David Lodge says (and whom Hoover quotes), that James *had* style but that he had a late style. Hoover's work, supported by carefully structured textual comparisons within James's writing, leads to a discussion of features in a set of sample passages that are indexed both to other critics' work on James's style and the specific features Hoover establishes. The "obscurity" of the late style ultimately manifests in words like *shimmered*, *hovered*, and *faltered*—those words describing indefiniteness so important to *The Ambassadors*.

17. In chapter 1, I treat her essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" as a nineteenth-century example of what is to be gained by a reductive, even mean critical attitude. In chapter 2, I use a satiric parody of *Adam Bede* in an 1861 moralist review to understand how critics engaged with style as part of a text's moral influence (Eliot is one of nearly a dozen authors reviewed in the *London Quarterly Review*). In chapter 3, as a novelist and essayist, she is the central figure. Her centrality to contemporary criticism is also illuminating. It is possible, for example, to contrast the moralist nineteenth-century *Adam Bede* review not only with Wayne Booth's analogous treatment of a passage from Céline but with J. Hillis Miller's pastiche of Eliot in *Ethics of Reading* (1987). Moreover, the sentence structure I found in a survey of one-third of all the sentences in *Middlemarch* crops up in Catherine Gallagher's 2005 discussion of Eliot's thinking about the power of representation. If sociologically inflected distant reading seeks to counterbalance the effects of canonicity or the way that key figures have been overrepresented, then my focus on critical method means Eliot is important *because* she is overrepresented.

18. George Eliot and Elizabeth Barrett Browning are two of the central figures in Deirdre David's *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy*: "Empowered by vocation to reveal the connections between God, man, culture, and society which have been obscured in a secular world, the ideal poet is made a woman poet in *Aurora Leigh*" (129).

CHAPTER ONE: In Defense of Reading Reductively

1. See Baker, *The Aesthetics of Clarity and Confusion.*

2. McGann limits the usefulness of the *English Poetry Full-Text Database* to its role as "a vast concordance" and (mark how far we've come!) as "an initial source for texts that we don't have in our library" ("Radiant Textuality," 383). "The hardest trick is to think up sufficiently clever questions to keep it busy," according to Sutherland ("When in ROM," par. 4).

3. The thing that Laurie Phillips, the head of my university's acquisitions/cataloging team, likes about Proquest's archival databases today is their search interfaces (personal conversation, July 23, 2015).

4. This enabled us to separate narrative sentences from dialogue and "mixed sentences" from either pure narrative or pure dialogue (an offshoot Moretti and I began working on that ultimately became part of this project instead). Narratology has always had a strong grammatical component and is a natural fit for digital work. In this book, I focus on grammatical elements that are especially interesting in a fictional context like tense (past vs. present), point of view (third person vs. second or first person), and the representation of thought/speech/writing as opposed to description.

5. See also Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*.

6. See Casie LeGette, *Remaking Romanticism,* and Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, *Slow Print*.

7. One could also, by contrast, compare the keynote struck at the beginning of *Middlemarch* to the confusion of qualities that open *Emma*: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence." (18). Such qualities pose a moral problem more than they inscribe a moral fact; Emma may *seem* to unite the best blessings of existence in the amoral attributes of wealth, cleverness, and beauty, but the novel's plot turns on the "evils" of her circumstances: "the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (18). If the first sentence of Emma leaves open the question of her virtue in its playful invocation of her blessings, the first sentence of *Middlemarch* inaugurates a novel-length study of an ideal of beauty Dorothea possesses from the beginning. The quality most relevant to the trajectory of her role in the novel—her exceptional beauty—is clear from the very first line.

8. For Eliot's approach to the problem of "category," or the relationship between the type and the example, see Catherine Gallagher's "George Eliot: Immanent Victorian," in which she argues that Dorothea's "becoming real" happens through the "exhaustion" of all possibilities that could have been predicted: "Dorothea must undergo paradigm exhaustion; she must be, as we say in the vernacular, troped out"; "the details of her affliction force the plot to swerve from its trajectories repeatedly, to be retrieved by other general scenarios, or standard deviations, until the subcategories seem exhausted" (69). The expansive possibility of modifying clauses can be understood as a grammatical expression of the possibility that there could be a new, more precise category. That is why they are neither exhaustive nor predictive.

9. "In part because of established disciplinary protocols, such ascriptions often seem not be an integral part of the formal argument; indeed, it typically remains unclear, when they appear, whether they are gratuitous or crucially significant, descriptive flourish or evaluative death-blow" (Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now*, 134).

10. Nowviskie argues that the phrase, which sounds like a caricature of brogrammer anti-intellectualism, did not originate in a pejorative idea of yacking as understood by a scholar of literature or history as intellectual labor (in which case "yacking—by some definition of the term—*is your work*") but in the idea of yacking as understood by, say, "a staff member in a digital center, or an academic service professional like a librarian, instructional technologist, or digital archivist," for whom the "endemic, hour-by-hour 'meeting culture' of an increasingly bureaucratic, often ill-managed, and top-heavy university means that, for many, time spent yacking is *the number-one thing* preventing us from doing our jobs" ("On the Origin of 'Hack' and 'Yack' ").

11. Houston's example in this case uses type-token ratio, which "can be thought of as a measure of how frequently a reader encounters a new word during the experience of reading the text," to compare Elizabeth Barrett Browning's style to Christina Rossetti's: "In order to read a text (with human or computational insight) one must decide what defines the text and its large and small constitutive elements, down to the level of the word or syllable. One must decide which words to

pay attention to, or count. And one must decide how to define the meaning discovered, derived, created or found in those words" ("Toward a Computational Analysis of Victorian Poetry," 509, 508). My argument here is that this first interdisciplinary step is equally valuable for nondigital projects.

12. See Moretti, " 'Operationalizing.' "

13. Kieran Healy makes a similar argument in an article called "Fuck Nuance": "Instead of pushing some abstraction or argument along for a while to see where it goes, we have a tendency to start hedging theory with particulars" (122).

14. Best and Marcus's "surface reading" also begins from the most evident textual features: "As much as our objects of study may conceal the structures that give rise to them, they also wear them on their sleeves" (18).

15. Sedgwick's reparative reading pits localized "weak theory" against the "reach and reductiveness" of strong theory as a way of thinking through the many alternative affects to paranoia, but Love argues for the "energizing force of paranoia in [Sedgwick's] work" ("Truth and Consequences," 240).

16. Miller's and, of course, Sedgwick's. The title of the introduction to *Epistemology of the Closet* is "Axiomatic": "In dealing with open-secret structure, it's only by being shameless about risking the obvious that we happen into the vicinity of the transformative" (22). Here, laying one's cards on the table is the central critical move.

17. It is worth recalling here Rita Felski's cautions against a metaphorical slip from text to person, which she develops in a discussion of "texts as fragile quasi-persons": "Texts, after all, are neither moral nor sentient, and not even the most ruthless or reductive analysis can destroy an object made out of words that survives unscathed to be read anew by other readers. Like the perky plastic rodents in a carnival game of Whac-A-Mole [*sic*], the text pops back up again after we bash it with our rubber mallet" (*Limits of Critique,* 114). Amy Hungerford makes a similar point in *The Holocaust of Texts* (2003). After analytical argument, the text endures. Computational analysis often entails reducing a text to its parts—in topic modeling, for example, a document is treated like "a bag of words," probabilistically rearranged according to how likely (and unlikely) words are to co-occur with one another. Felski's mallet analogy resonates with MALLET, described on its homepage as the "Java-based package for statistical natural language processing, document classification, clustering, topic modeling, information extraction, and other machine learning applications to text" that seems cheekily to invoke the old adage: If you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail" (http://mallet.cs.umass.edu).

18. Fionnuala Dillane draws this term from an 1838 article in the *London and Westminster Review* (*Before George Eliot*, 81).

19. This poem structures the contrast between performative march and the everyday lunch counter in terms of the intersection of multiple binaries. The hierarchizing of identity categories might destroy the poet and even the liberation movements, but the codes of race and gender provide the keys to the story that unfolds. What does reductionism help us see? The pussy hat of 2017 read as an astonishingly literal return to a biological concept of gender, though hundreds of them were made by hand by people who can quote by memory from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990). Is the pussy hat a reminder of the biological basis of misogyny or a playful comment on how we make the meaning of anatomy in our heads?

20. Computational methods for text analysis manage complexity by focusing on very simple units of text, so the key to producing generative criticism is to reduce the text in a way that will shed light on a complex literary-critical question. Binary notation is the language the Internet speaks to itself. Ted Underwood argues that "the whole point of quantification is to get beyond binary categories—to grapple with questions of degree that aren't well-represented as yes-or-no questions. Classification algorithms, for instance, are actually very good at shades of gray; they

can express predictions as degrees of probability and assign the same text different degrees of membership in as many overlapping categories as you like. So I think it should feel intuitive that a quantitative approach to literary history would have the effect of loosening up categories that we now tend to treat too much as homogenous bodies. If you need to deal with gradients of difference, numbers are your friend" ("Seven Ways Humanists Are Using Computers to Understand Text"). Numbers are your friend because they make it possible to distinguish shades of gray. This is not the scientism that people are worried about. The approach to computational criticism most liable to criticism on the grounds that it is boring or—more provocatively—unconvincing is fundamentally a form of hypothesis testing: *is the argument we know true*? But instead of trying to prove or disprove our preconceptions about say, genre, style, and the canon (to draw on the projects I was involved with), we try to define them more clearly in order to learn more about them.

CHAPTER TWO: The Shockingly Subtle Criticism of the *London Quarterly Review*, 1855–1861

1. E. P. Thompson makes a similar observation of Ruskin: "It was generally held that the arts had some didactic, or even utilitarian, task to perform. But between the generally held view and Ruskin's view there was the difference that lies between the words 'moralizing' and 'moral.' The Victorian critics were content that art should moral*ize*, should point *a* moral congenial to established society: and, in his weaker moments, Ruskin fell as deeply into this error as any other. But, at his best, Ruskin sought to treat the arts as the expression of the *whole moral being* of the artist, and—through him—of the quality of life of the society in which the artist lived" (*William Morris*, 34).

2. An anonymous review of McNicoll's essays closes the issue that precedes that which opens with "Novels and Novelists": "The introductory remarks on style," writes the reviewer, "are masterly, and we doubt whether the effect of a perfect style was ever better expressed than in the words, 'The reader will sensibly enjoy the presence of his author's mind.' Of Tennyson Mr. M'Nicoll is a great admirer, greater than we can warm ourselves into; but we have met with no one who gives such good reason for his admiration" (280).

3. The Wellesley Index attributes a "consistency of tone and purpose" in the *London Quarterly Review* to the relative consistency of its editors, beginning with the first one, Thomas McNicoll, who contributed articles on poetry (Houghton, "The *London Quarterly Review*," 373). The articles attributed to McNicoll dwell on the connection between style and morality. The essays positively identified as his are those included in the 1861 collection *Essays on English Literature*.

4. Drawing on the work of Isobel Armstrong, Ian Small, John Gross, and John Woolford, Joanne Shattock sketches out the "new generation of critics of the 1860's," which included Richard Holt Hutton and was to see an increasing professionalization of criticism, as well as documents the demise of the expansive quarterly review along with its norm of anonymity ("The Culture of Criticism," 78–79, 81).

5. Matthew Sussman argues that as aesthetic questions grew more distinct over the course of the century, the critical language describing style bore more moral weight, as if "to enhance the distinctiveness of aesthetic appreciation without depriving it of its ethical force" ("Stylistic Virtue in Nineteenth-Century Criticism," 228). Suzy Anger's account of Victorian interpretive practice mildly states that it will not attend to "those interesting varieties of criticism whose primary concern is merit or appreciation" (*Victorian Interpretation*, 131).

6. Shattock locates the *London Quarterly Review* among a third generation of midcentury quarterlies aimed at upper- and upper-middle class readers, later replaced by monthlies and ultimately newspapers ("Reviews," 523, 538–39). It reviewed new books in "all published forms of knowledge" in substantial articles of up to forty pages containing long extracts (538). Dunlap emphasizes its "prestige" and "intellectual rigour" ("The *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*,"

205, 204): "In any one issue a scholarly review of a new edition of a Greek text might precede a notice of a popular Methodist devotional work, thus appealing to the reader's scholarly and devotional concerns" (205). Dunlap argues that "the review was nonpolitical in the sense that it supported neither party, but it did advocate ever more strongly a 'Social Gospel' at variance with Wesley's own views" (204).

7. Maitzen sets aside the problem of narrow moralizing to recuperate the ethical aspirations of Victorian criticism by considering how literary critics sought to teach readers about mode (genre), characterization (particularly "how sympathy is allocated"), and—of primary concern here—tone, which recognized overt didacticism as a problem (" 'The Soul of Art,' "160, 170, 165).

8. Reviews in the major midcentury periodicals often reproduced large blocks of text as if they spoke for themselves; Nicholas Dames argues that, in a sense, there is a way that this is true, insofar as this method "implies some sense of a common range of reading, a response that almost all readers would have" ("On Not Close Reading," 25). By contrast, summary and paraphrase can prevent readers from having such a common response.

9. The Wellesley Index compares the *London Quarterly Review* to the Presbyterian *North British Review* (1844), the Unitarian *Prospective Review* (1845), and the Congregational *British Quarterly Review* (Houghton, "The *London Quarterly Review*," 371). In an overview of religious periodicals, Josef L. Altholz observes that "quarterly reviews were the most ponderous and pretentious type of periodical, only ventured upon by groups with adequate financial resources" (*The Religious Press in Britain*, 75).

10. The review of *Evangelical Meditations* also considers the style of Joseph Edward Jackson's *Cecil and Mary*, which seems promising— "The whole poem breathes a pure, religious, and missionary spirit"—but goes on to say that "it is for this reason that we regret its excess of sentiment and imagery. A manly, simple and direct style would surely have better seconded the author's purpose" so the hero might "tell you plainly what a thing *is*" rather than what it is "*like*" (561).

11. This review was originally published in April 1855, a year after W. E. Aytoun's satire on Gilfillan's gushing enthusiasm appeared in *Blackwoods*. McNicoll's satire is tinged with the same class-based criticism but focuses on a distinctly moral reading of the consequences of Gilfillan's wild comparisons. This piece was identified by the reviewer of *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* as "the most readable" article in the issue (see Houghton, "The *London Quarterly Review*"). "Having little hope of Mr. Gilfillan's improvement," McNicoll notes, "we shall glance at some of his more prominent peculiarities rather with a view to the reader's profit than his own" (188). His criticism and the criticism of the review he edited apply an explicitly ideological lens to the texts under review. In a subsequent essay on "Popular Authorship," McNicoll reflects on the criticism of Gilfillan, noting that the faults of "exaggeration and bombast" were more flagrant "because occurring in the didactic pages of a literary censor" (464). Chris Baldick traces the aftereffects of such moralist criticism in *The Social Mission of English Criticism*, moving backward from Arnold's mission through to Charles Augustin Saint-Beuve, reminding us that "there is no impassable gulf between censorship and criticism; the former may often be seen as a paradigm of the latter or, so to speak, its armed wing. . . . Criticism from Plato onwards has . . . presupposed censorship, banishment, and official persecution in the very language of its 'judgements' and in its images of its own authority" (9).

12. This review keys its aesthetic judgments to the portrayal of "fallen women" in Dickens, Trollope, Eliot, and Thackeray. The only Trollope novel condemned in this review, *The Bertrams*, is criticized because of a "sad interview between Bertram and Lady Halcourt, in which their love and misery are so touchingly told" that readers are given grounds "to excuse, or even to indulge them in a few more loving words. . . . It is immoral to make us feel thus" ("Novels and Novelists," 290–91). There, no citation is given, and the reviewer soon concludes: "We trust its faults will prove a solitary exception to Mr. Trollope's high excellence as a writer of fiction" (291). In his

introduction to this review in *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, David Carroll calls it "typical of the attacks on George Eliot's irreligion which developed after her pseudonym was lifted"—part of a larger pattern, though Eliot is referred to as "he" in the review (104, 107).

13. That reviews are a central site for how we understand novel theory in the period is clear from the titles of major anthologies: Richard Stang's *The Theory of the Novel in England* (1959), Kenneth Graham's *English Criticism of the Novel* (1965), John Charles Olmsted's *A Victorian Art of Fiction* (1979), Edwin Eigner and George Worth's *Victorian Criticism of the Novel* (1985), David Skilton's *The Early and Mid-Victorian Novel* (1993), and Maitzen's *The Victorian Art of Fiction* (2009). Reviews also appear in author-focused collections: "Novels and Novelists," for example, which treats nineteen different books, makes a brief appearance in Stuart Hutchinson's *George Eliot: Critical Assessments*.

14. We could also place the practice of critical extraction that resists analysis in context of Matthew Arnold's method of critical touchstones. In *The Social Mission of English Criticism*, Chris Baldick argues that placing "facts" side by side lets Arnold recast a conservative agenda as implicit truth. In *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel* (2000), Leah Price calls attention to how the review, like the anthology, is a "means of representing texts for a wider audience"—the key difference being "the proportion of excerpts to frame" (138). Price's argument is focused on the history of aesthetic evaluation, the shifting fortunes of "summary and synecdoche" as interpretive modes (156). Baldick connects the reproduction of purple passages to the "civilizing" mission of teaching literature.

15. Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan trace a recent critical move of reaching to the nineteenth century for alternatives to professional hermeneutics—ways of thinking past the isolated reader / text relation, which they trace across the New Historicist break with older modes of criticism. Despite the interdisciplinarity that widened the scope of literary study, they argue, the professional relationship of reader and text was still characterized by a loss of the social or collective aspect of reading: thus David Kurnick's stage, Leah Price's circulating books, and Elaine Freedgood's things that are things and not metaphors are important models for a yet "more durable expansion of the things we can know and the ways we can know them" ("Interpretation," 617).

16. Personal conversation, January 26, 2014.

17. Price is interested in how books are put to use by readers, teachers, reviewers, and editors, and she focuses on the strategies for making them shorter rather than (as I do here) as a basis for conveying critical judgment. In *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel,* Price argues that the "impossibility of fitting all eight volumes of *Clarissa* or seven of *Grandison* into the human mind at once turns readers into editors" (13). Price connects nineteenth-century practice with cultures of reading today and traces the trajectories of reading for the part and reading for the whole. Her chapter on Samuel Richardson considers abridgments in which "synoptic narrative alternates with synecdochal extracts," like the supplement to *Clarissa* that "sandwiches excerpts with summaries" (16, 24). Our emphasis differs: Price's general approach is to track the fate of the especially meaningful passage rather than statements focused on the novel as a whole.

18. Spending most of the space on an instructive contrast between Eliot and Thackeray, the reviewer disposes of two novels by Bulwer-Lytton, one by Charlotte Yonge, and two by Thomas Hughes in short order.

19. Trollope is admired for his presentation of character and Kingsley for "lucid summary." As Kingsley's title suggests, the novel historicizes nineteenth-century religious and cultural battles, and this closing statement is both a précis of what was to become of the early church and a prognosis of what would become of Victorian factions. The review comprises three pages of reflection on the separation of church from state—the topic of Kingsley's novel—and some criticism of Kingsley's tendency to "[slide] off into dialectics"—for example, to come off as a democrat in *Alton Locke* (299).

20. These maxims are related to context but not dependent on it. One example is "Those high political grapes had become sour, my sneering friends will say. Well! is it not a good thing that grapes should become sour which hang out of reach? Is he not wise who can regard all grapes as sour, which are manifestly too high for his hand? . . . In this frame of mind, [the archdeacon who had not been appointed bishop of Westminster] walked home to his wife" (*Framley Parsonage*, 4)." Another example, largely political, is "No reform, no innovation, stinks so foully in the nostrils of an English Tory politician, as to be absolutely irreconcilable to him" (*The Bertrams*, 4).

21. As in Hutton's discussion of Craik, plot is a key element of moral development. Of Charlotte Yonge's *Heir of Redclyffe*, in which a sympathetic figure dies in the service of a rotten one, the reviewer writes, "By her skilfull treatment of the lighter parts of the story, she prevents the mind from being oppressed by its pathos, and so well works out her hidden meaning, without giving it a formal expression, that she makes us feel there is something better than earthy happiness and success (311).

22. The review of E. Elliott's *Labour and Live* (1857) in the October 1858 "Brief Literary Notices" section begins: "This story exemplifies both the kind and the degree of moral purpose which may lawfully rule the novelist's design, without any danger of either weakening or prostituting its aesthetic charms. It is no zealous *ex parte* pleading in the guise of fiction for some disputable theory, no one-sided protest against some institution too open to abuse; it is a quiet assertion everywhere felt, and the practical assertion of a principle by everyone allowed. . . . In a series of domestic pictures drawn with considerable skill, the author shows that labour—systematic, plodding labour—is the condition of all individual happiness and social well-being. . . . This moral, we say, is pleasantly inculcated in the volume now before us (281).

23. W. R. Greg's classic "The False Morality of Lady Novelists" (1861) also uses summary to break up intimacy with "exemplary" characters. He argues that despite the "lightness of novels," fiction might "constitute precisely that branch of the intellectual activity of a nation which a far-seeing moralist might watch with the most vigilant concern, and supervise with the most unceasing care" (145). Greg's essay depends entirely on a summary that tends toward a central point: his lament that "the power of acting right should be so often divorced from the faculty of seeing straight" (151).

24. The full passage reads as follows: "Our sympathies are enlisted with the smooth working of the great social machine, which demands not only that gentleness and goodness should prosper, but that weakness should suffer, and wickedness be punished" (296, 286–87).

25. The "Novels and Novelists" reviewer contrasts the "poetical justice" of *The Three Clerks* with "serviceable worldly wisdom" via a synopsis; Kurnick contrasts the "parable" described by Pippins with James's style, which "harbors a radically collectivist ethical imagination only tangentially related to the differentiating moralism of his plots" (*Empty Houses,* 214).

26. The discussion of George Eliot's work is about four pages longer (and thus almost twice as long) as the discussion of Trollope's, Thackeray's, or Kingsley's.

27. The review gives a kind of eye roll at the notion of finding favor with the book for its "religious talk," noting that "mere words" cannot "constitute religion in a book any more than in a life" ("Novels and Novelists," 302).

28. The summary continues: "We say, unresistingly, for we count it no resistance to make resolutions which are never put in practice. In the course of three months, (for this is no gradual fall!) he is represented as pursuing his object almost without a struggle, lying to disguise it without a blush, and then leaving his victim, with very insufficient precautions to save her from the worst consequences of their mutual wrong-doing. Then Hetty, without the smallest demur, accepts Adam Bede as an affianced lover, and prepares to marry him; until, overwhelmed by the certainty of her disgrace, she takes to flight, murders her baby in a fit of lightheadedness, is tried, and condemned to die,—Arthur only becoming aware of her situation in time to exert his utmost

efforts change the sentence of death into transportation. Then both become penitent, and are put out of sight for some years, after which Arthur returns home, and Hetty dies" ("Novels and Novelists," 302).

29. Lisa Rodensky offers a legal perspective on the question raised by this reviewer about culpability and consequence in *Adam Bede* in chapter 2 of her *Crime in Mind*.

30. Trollope, unlike Eliot, "never teaches us to call right wrong, or wrong right; and rarely forces on us a tolerance of wrong, by the personal argument that we, too, under the same temptation, might have felt or done the same" ("Novels and Novelists," 288).

31. The central message of *The Mill on the Floss*, according to this review, is that it promotes "the heathen idea of tragedy,—man conquered by destiny; ours is the Christian idea of tragedy,—destiny conquered by man" ("Novels and Novelists," 309). Moreover, "it is not lawful to use genius to invest character and circumstance with all the power of destiny, and by so doing to undermine the heroism of common life, the sacred power of resistance to evil, implanted and sustained by God in man" (309–10).

32. In "Ephemeral Forms," Rachel Buurma offers an alternative reading to the close paraphrase of authorial language in Dallas: namely, that he ventriloquizes nineteenth-century texts to show that the author is the same on every page, as an assertion of the permanence of criticism with respect to the novel.

33. Harry Shaw cites Booth's reading of Céline in this passage in his essay on the coercive implications of "making readers" in Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction*. Shaw argues that Booth's move, following Peter Rabinowitz, toward a more textured thinking about audience and ultimately toward the idea of the credulous listener is a way "to register fiction's invasive power, but also to segregate that power from other aspects of reading" ("Making Readers," 209). The "Novels and Novelists" review is centrally about the invasive and coercive powers of fiction and shares Booth's central concerns as outlined by Shaw in this essay: "Booth disapproves of a situation in which readers are at the mercy of ethically unintelligible fictional worlds, for he fears that exposure to such worlds will eat away at our ability to make ethical judgments in general. Hence the attack on Céline in the last chapter of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Inundated readers, readers at loose ends, are unlikely to become peers a responsible author would want to have around, much less to have created. (There is a significant parallel here with Georg Lukacs's rejection of art that, in his view, overwhelms readers with a stream of undifferentiated impressions, preventing action and thereby helping to keep in place the status quo it refuses to analyze.) This fear becomes the basis for a call for authors to exercise a benign form of power, to help readers up the steep and dangerous cliff to a vantage point from which they will be able to see things steadily and whole" (208).

CHAPTER THREE: Relative Clauses and the Narrative Present Tense in George Eliot

1. Among critics who have written on the vein of satire running through this novel, I follow J. Hillis Miller and Rae Greiner in attending to the problem that knowledge of others may not (and sometimes cannot) lead one to sympathize with them. Miller points out that the narrative commentary is often "ironically and even comically critical" and that though "the narrator says we should sympathize, . . . [t]he narrative discourse gives grounds rather for the delicious pleasure of Eliotic irony at the expense of the characters (*Reading for Our Time*, 53, 54). Greiner locates Eliot's "sympathetic realism" within a larger literary and philosophical history of the concept in her recent book, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. I focus here on how the limits of sympathy are registered in a textual pattern. While the transformation of the abstraction of narrative detail into moralized generalization might model the transition from knowledge to sympathy, it more often tracks a transition from knowledge to moral judgment.

2. Approximately 5 percent of the sentences in the survey contained present-tense forms, of

which 40 percent were hybrid past-present sentences. Of these 113 sentences, 43 contained commentative clauses (38 percent of all past-present hybrids). Commentative clauses describe moods, moments, and experiences associated with the characters as well as characteristics. I consider commentative clauses throughout the novel and not only those I counted in my survey. Eighteen of the forty-three commentative clauses I found are associated with Lydgate's free-indirect discourse or describe him directly; the next-closest characters were Rosamond and Causaubon, who were described by five commentative clauses apiece (two of Rosamond's overlap with Lydgate's), and Dorothea was described by four. By looking at hybrid sentences that include both tenses, this study challenges the sharp narratological distinction between present-tense moral commentary and past-tense narration.

3. My focus is on how an essayistic gnomic present works in the novel. For more on how the gnomic present tense works in the essay, see, for example, Harry E. Shaw's discussion of Auerbach's historicized gnomic present in *Narrating Reality* (119–20).

4. Biber and his coauthors explain that the notion of the sentence pertains primarily to writing because there are too many nonclausal units in speech (inserts like "Oh" and "Well" and syntactic nonclausal units that stand alone like "poor kids" and "good for you") (*Longman's Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, 1082–1104). Moreover, "speech is a continuous stream of sound without a clear division into units, but it can be analyzed into meaningful elements which recur and combine according to rules. In writing, such an analysis is expressed through the division into words and sentences" (50).

5. My thanks to Franco Moretti for this formulation.

6. Hutton acknowledges the limitations of his position as a reviewer of a novel published serially: "George Eliot has, no doubt, often smiled in reading the criticisms passed on her drift and purpose by those who had but part of her design before them. But so would any one who could see the end from the beginning often smile at the partial and fragmentary criticisms passed on human life" (292). Hutton's partiality to Rosamond in the early review would have been met with more direct evidence of her coldness and selfishness as the plot developed. I have suggested that you know everything you need to know about Rosamond from the relative clauses, but Hutton's comment shows how their place in the plot or the context of their occurrence at a first reading might shape the way you interpret them.

7. Another example of this interplay appears in that early paragraph on the possibility of the Lydgate marriage: "To Rosamond it seemed as if she and Lydgate were as good as engaged," and while Lydgate had other plans, "circumstances were almost sure to be on the side of Rosamond's idea, which had a shaping activity and looked through watchful blue eyes, whereas Lydgate's lay blind and unconcerned as a jelly-fish which gets melted without knowing it" (271). Again, in the commentative clause that rounds out the simile is the most vivid part of the sentence and describes the *process* undergone by the jellyfish.

8. David Kurnick argues that "the ontological middle-ground [between observable people and observable types] is not only constructed by the realist novel but portrayed in it as a fundamental object of the desire of fictional characters themselves" in an "erotics of detachment" —to become, not a character in a novel, but a reader of a novel: Daniel Deronda at thirteen, reading on the grass (about to discover why the popes and cardinals had so many nephews) ("An Erotics of Detachment," 605). Daniel Wright counters Gallagher's emphasis on embodied particularity and Kurnick's on detachment with an argument in favor of Eliot's vagueness, which, like John Venn's diagrams, offers "simplified stand-ins for a dizzyingly complex range of possibilities"; here, erotic desire suggests "a kind of miry *depth* of situated ethical knowledge rather than (or perhaps in addition to) the detached, critical view of the narrator or reader" ("George Eliot's Vagueness," 644, 630).

9. According to Lanser's argument in *Fictions of Authority*, the maxim against the use of

maxims is a one element of a toning down of narrative authority intended to distance the novels from the controversial public figure of "George Eliot." Price argues in *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel* that Eliot uses the maxim against maxims to distance herself from the proliferating forms of wisdom literature.

10. Kent Puckett points out that the brain here is "not only an organ of intelligence, but also an organ," revealing the inextricability of the high and the low, idea and sensation, in *Middlemarch* ("Stupid Sensations," 297; see also his *Bad Form* [2008]).

11. In my survey, Lydgate was described by commentative clauses three times more than any other character.

12. A slightly different example of a narrative gloss on Rosamond's language is the passage in which Lydgate remarks on Dorothea's devotion to Casaubon: "'Of course she is devoted to her husband,' said Rosamond, implying a notion of necessary sequence which the scientific man regarded as the prettiest possible for a woman; but she was thinking at the same time that it was not so very melancholy to be mistress of Lowick Manor with a husband likely to die soon" (293).

13. Her exemplarity in this respect is oddly perfect, as Rosamond is the character who is like the candle around which the circles arrange themselves in the pier glass: the reflection in the glass from "the candle is the egoism of any person now absent—of Miss Vincy, for example" (264). For a brilliant reading of the scene between her and Dorothea, see Marcus, *Between Women*.

14. My thanks to Garrett Stewart for this question, posed at the conference of the 2009 International Society for the Study of Narrative.

15. I extrapolate this phrase from Eliot's review of Wilhelm Henrich Riehl's *Natural History of German Life*, which George Levine calls "a kind of manifesto for moral realism" in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* (8). The Riehl essay opens with a hypothetical discussion of which of two men can give the best opinion of a new railway to be built. "One who knows little about railways may entertain very expanded views as to the multiplication of railways in the abstract, and their ultimate function in civilization. . . . But it is evident that if we want a railway to be made, the man of wide views and narrow observation will not serve our purpose" (268). The implication is that the best opinion is drawn from the man of wide observation and narrow views.

16. This passage is not a commentative clause but the type of running commentary that shifts to the present by means of a simile. I include it here because, like a commentative clause, it subordinates a key idea and describes it at length, weaving present tense into the past.

17. Matthew Sussman also quotes this passage, in an essay on how James uses ambiguity to develop in the reader the kind of striving after lucidity sought after by, say, the narrator of "The Figure in the Carpet" ("Disambiguating Henry James," 19). Sussman paraphrases Adorno thus: "The ethically responsible writer will not choose a readily comprehensible form for her message but select one that challenges the reader through its careful but unfamiliar specificity" (10). This reading opposes the "readily comprehensible" form to the "challenging" form, but one might equally argue that Adorno opposes a readily uncomprehended form to a painstakingingly (but more accurately) comprehended one.

18. Eliot's last published work appeared three years after *Daniel Deronda* and is shaped after the *Characters* of Theophrastus (ca. 370–288 BC).

CHAPTER FOUR: Generalization and Declamation

1. Linda Peterson's "Rewriting 'A History of the Lyre'" puts the poem in context of Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1850) and Letitia Landon's "A History of the Lyre" (1829).

2. *Aurora Leigh* has two plots: the narrative of its heroine's development as a poet and the story of her marriage. The final four books have often been understood as an ideologically conservative appendix to the first half, as the plot moves Aurora toward marriage. It is a central

feminist text of the Victorian canon "in spite of"—as Cora Kaplan puts it in her introduction to the 1978 edition—"its conventional happy ending" (456). Alison Case argues that the mixed forms of narration "create a kind of double teleology for the novel, in which the struggle toward artistic independence and success, the plot of poetic 'ambition,' could be kept relatively isolated from the undermining influence of the traditional love-story" (*Plotting Women*, 124). In the last four books, then, "The relationship of events to the novel's ending—in other words, Aurora's continuing state of error—can no longer be signaled authoritatively by Aurora herself, as she now writes from a position of immersion in events rather than of confident hindsight" (120–21). Monique Morgan proposes instead that the change in temporality signals a shift in the nature of represented truth: "Epistolary narratives are implied to be more truthful than retrospective ones, precisely because epistolary forms are more willing to incorporate or acknowledge error" (*Narrative Means, Lyric Ends*,139). It seems to me exactly right that the loss of narrative mastery is evidence of artistic and even moral maturity: the "installments" approach truth more closely than the past-tense narrative forms precisely because none pretends to have the final say.

3. Mary Mullen clarifies the political potential of non-end-oriented conceptions of history in the multiple temporalities at work in *Aurora Leigh*. Rather than focusing on the temporal difference between epic and novel, Mullen figures multiple temporalities in the novel as a conflict between the two protagonists as "two clocks"—Aurora echoes Carlyle's resistance to "narrative time" while Romney figures John Stuart Mill's progressive, imperialist narrative time, 67. For Mullen, "literature, as a site of the multiform, engages with the age not as a historical totality but rather as a source of historical multiplicity" ("Two Clocks," 77).

4. "Prophet-poet" is Christine Chaney's term in a suggestive comparison of *Aurora Leigh* to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters in Sweden* (1796): they are both "polemical life narrative[s]," "held together [as portraits] . . . by jointures under the common heading of recurrent 'thematic' interests—the status of the woman writer, female vocation," etc. (792, 794). The comparison is suggestive but does not account for the role of poetry in the novel's form or the unique position of the poetess as a figure in Victorian culture.

5. How much revision of part 1 took place before the publication of part 2 is unknown, though Julia Markus cites two inconsistencies in the text that suggest there was no substantial late revision of the poem during 1847 and 1848. As to revisions made after the book was complete, Markus observes that "we do not find in any manuscript or in either printed version an attitude or idea changed or shifted—the attempt is always to intensify and tighten imagery, and to sharpen the expression of point of view"—which is remarkable considering the historical break between the two periods of its composition ("The Variant Readings," 119).

6. Markus cites the self-deprecation of this passage as one reason for critical dismissal of *Casa Guidi Windows* (introduction, xvii–xix). See also Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 165. As in *Aurora Leigh*, the apparent displacement of part 1 by part 2 can be read as a retreat from the attitudes embraced there. Alison Chapman argues that despite a tradition of reading part 2 as a retreat from part 1, the poem uses Casa Guidi to create "a muscular, yet maternal, public political voice transmitted from the shuttered room of a bourgeois palazzo" (*Networking the Nation*, 84–85, 88). I suggest that the most appropriate metaphor might not be growth or even dialectic but something like a reboot.

7. "And yet we must / Beware, and mark the natural kiths and kins / Of circumstance and office, and distrust / The rich man reasoning in a poor man's hut" (1.887–90).

8. For example, Angela Leighton defines double vision as the "stress and tension" of bringing together "the near and far, the personal and the general, the poetic and the political" (*Victorian Women Poets*, 109). For Holly Laird, who reads *Aurora Leigh* as literary theory, "double vision" is a politically-engaged poetics that combines Wordsworth's "advocacy of a solitary songster" with Carlyle's "demand for a didactic writer with urban concerns" ("*Aurora Leigh*," 357).

9. The lines I have discussed so far are part of a theory of poetics in book 5 that is outlined in consecutive verse paragraphs, linked by continuous lines. In the first full break in verse paragraphs following this discussion, the poetess-narrator expressly asks, "What form is best for poems?" (5.223).

10. For example, Aurora berates herself in book 4 for not correcting Romney when he called her rival Lady Waldemar "good." A mid-line break in verse paragraphs is followed by an imperative: "Distrust that word. / 'There is none good save God,' said Jesus Christ" (4.480–81). This claim is followed by a digression on "good" neighbors—and then good wives, mothers, and friends and finally by an anaphoric paragraph on good critics, statesmen, patriots, kings, popes, and Christians. "A good neighbour, even in this, / Is fatal sometimes,—cuts your morning up / To mincemeat of the very smallest talk, / Then helps to sugar her bohea at night / With your reputation. I have known good wives, / As chaste, or nearly so, as Potiphar's; / And good, good mothers, who would use a child / To better an intrigue; good friends, beside, / (Very good) who hung succinctly round your neck / And sucked your breath, as cats are fabled to do/By sleeping infants. And we have all known / Good critics who have stamped out poet's hopes, / Good statesmen who pulled ruin on the state, / Good patriots who for a theory risked a cause, / Good kings who disembowelled for a tax, / Good popes who brought all good to jeopardy. / Good Christians who sate still in easy chairs / And damned the general world for standing up.— / Now may the good God pardon all good men!" (4.480–506).

11. "The first *I* of the novel-poem," who "has 'written much in prose and verse,'" asks us to be "conscious of the work's status as a highly crafted *literary* autobiography. . . . Doing so, we are presented with a complex metaphor for a self-consciously created and yet internally divided self. . . . [T]he oddness of the comparison, and particularly the fact that the 'friend' is male, invites a counterreading: that behind the advertised story of artistic self-creation lies a tale of thwarted or denied romantic love. And this in turn undermines our faith in the poet-narrator's artistic control, her understanding of the shape or meaning of her story" (Case, *Plotting Women*, 109–10).

12. Lukàcs suggests that the novel must create in itself a synthetic ideal and never-achieved totality, which requires that the novel establish "a fluctuating yet firm balance between becoming and being; as the idea of becoming, it becomes a state. Thus the novel, by transforming itself into a normative being of becoming, surmounts itself" (*Theory of the Novel*, 73). In Lukacsian terms, then, the point at which Aurora starts to reflect on the subject of epic—"what form is best for poems"—is when the text most self-consciously begins to work like a novel, in search of a form "in tune" with the world and an expressive interiority (5.223). What Aurora calls "modern-day epic" is in fact obsessed with this "being of becoming," the portrayal of contemporary history.

13. Marjorie Stone cites Gerald Massey's 1862 retrospective in the *North British Review*: he observes that another critic (Roscoe in the *National Review*) "cries out against the savage contrast of burning lava and a woman's breast, because in the latter are concentrated the fullest and sweetest ideas of life. But that was not the side of the metaphor which was uppermost in the writer's mind, or which will flash first in the mind of any one who recalls the lava mould of that beautiful bosom found, if we remember rightly, amongst the ruins of Pompeii" (qtd. in Stone, "Critical Introduction," 3:xx). In "The Image in Lava" (1827), Felicia Hemans frames "the impression of a woman's form, with an infant clasped to the bosom, found at the uncovering of Herculaneum" as a "print upon the dust" of human love. Margot K. Louis, picking up on Angela Leighton's observation that while Barrett Browning is clearly responding to Hemans and LEL, "Aurora is a poet because she works and writes, not because she suffers and dies" (qtd. 1), argues that Barrett Browning transforms the image so that "the bosom itself is no longer an image of private devotion"; instead, "it embodies 'the age, . . . this live, throbbing age.' . . . Only when her heart contains this busy vastness can Aurora become a true and effective poet" (13).

14. See, for instance, George Saintsbury's 1904 *History of English Prosody*: "[The so-called

Spasmodic school] do not seem to have thought of going very far afield in metre or rhyme; in fact they could not go much further than Mrs. Browning—who was a Spasmodic in petticoats—had gone already" (262). Jason R. Rudy emphasizes the "palpitating, eroticized flesh of the poet's physical body" in his discussion of what he calls "spiritualist poetics" in *Aurora Leigh* (*Electric Meters,* 183, 15).

15. This review is usually cited for its antifeminist hostility and for Patmore's observation that this poem is "two thousand lines longer than *Paradise Lost*" (450). I'll return to another point in his critique—that too many lines of *Aurora Leigh* resemble prose.

16. The emphasis on the freedom of organic form in *Aurora Leigh*—and its strong connection with shapelessness—is the heir to the conception of self-shaping living form in romantic epigenetic poetics laid out by Denise Gigante in *Life* (23–35).

17. For example, Harrington reads the italicized line of Aurora's answer—"Let me think / *Of forms less and the external. Trust the spirit,* / As sovran nature does, to make the form" (5.225–26)—to the question "What form is best for poems?" (5.224) as a line that itself "tests the bounds of iambic pentameter" ("Measure of Time," 340).

18. See also Woolf's discussion of this passage in "*Aurora Leigh*" and Stone's discussion in "Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion."

19. Chorley opens his review with a plot summary, concluding that "this looks not like a poem, but a novel, belonging to the period which has produced 'Ruth,' [1853] and 'Villette,' [1853] and 'The Blithedale Romance' [1852]" (1426). Of course, blank verse infiltrated the novel, too: in 1846 Dickens wrote to John Forster that "if in going over the proofs you find the tendency to blank verse (I *cannot* help it, when I am very much in earnest) too strong, knock out a word's brains here and there" (*The Letters of Charles Dickens*, 2:305). My thanks to Tom Stillinger for the key example of blank verse from *Bleak House*: Jo was "Dead! . . . *And dying thus around us every day*" (734).

20. The poet's vocation to speak truth to the age is also opposed to the dramatist's fealty to the theater-going public. According to Aurora, a poetic spirit necessitates innovation of forms, while drama combines a misplaced fidelity to old forms with a servile relation to the present age: it "adopts the standard of the public taste," "wears a dog-chain round / Its regal neck" and "fawns close on pit and boxes, who clap hands / Commending chiefly its docility" (5.270–75). The argument here is echoed by the meter of the lines: within the discussion of modern epic, which contains many irregularities of meter, these lines stand out as emphatically iambic.

21. A discourse marker works both to "signal a transition in the evolving process of the conversation" and "to signal an interactive relationship between speaker, hearer and message" (Biber et al., *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, 1086).

22. Book 5 (along with books 1 and 2) is included in its entirety in (for example) the concise edition of the *Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory* and in the online *Elizabeth Barrett Browning Archive* (which also includes extracts from books 3 and 9). The table of contents in volume E of the ninth edition of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* lists the following extracts: "Book 1 ["The Education of Aurora Leigh"], Book 2 ["Aurora's Aspirations" and "Aurora's Rejection of Romney", and Book 5 ["Poets and the Present Age]."

23. After Aurora rejects Romney's proposal in book 2, he proposes to Marian, a virtuous, working-class woman, whom he met in the course of his philanthropic activities (book 3). Aurora is asked to visit Marian by a beautiful rival for Romney's affections, Lady Waldemar; Aurora approves Romney's choice. Marian then inexplicably leaves Romney at the altar (book 4). In book 5, by which time Aurora has found success through pastoral poetry but is ready to try her hand at the epic she aspires to, Aurora flees London for Italy at the news that Lady Waldemar is going to marry Romney. On her way there, she happens upon Marian in Paris, holding a baby. Marian explains that she was persuaded to leave Romney by Lady Waldemar and was then drugged, raped and abandoned. Aurora takes Marian and the baby to Italy with her. Romney ultimately

comes to Italy to propose again to Marian and to tell Aurora he was wrong to say the ideal was less important than the real; Marian refuses Romney and gives him to Aurora instead. The result is the synthesis of "Real & Ideal."

24. A comparable illustration of present-tense style as a mode of interpretive contest takes place between Romney and Aurora just after Marian disappears. Romney laments the purported contagion of Marian's "fallen" friend from childhood, and Aurora retorts that "some natures catch no plagues." She develops her idea through an unfortunate image of pure snow "drifted from the garden-bank / To the open road," which Romney points out will "pass for soot ere sunset" (4.1055–75).

25. As many critics have noticed, the closure of this novel-poem is actually a new beginning: Romney and Aurora's union in the "New Jerusalem" is the dawn of another day. Here, I am thinking of the marriage to Romney as synthesis of the binaries that structure their early debates and as the final synchrony of story and discourse.

CHAPTER FIVE: A Moral Technology

1. Fludernik's book describes many forms of speech and writing besides direct report; see also Elena Semino and Mick Short's *Corpus Stylistics*, which considers represented speech, thought, and writing. For discussions focused on speech as opposed to the narrative matrix around it, see Norman Page, *Speech in the English Novel*, and Raymond Chapman, *Forms of Speech in Victorian Fiction*.

2. Bronwen Thomas notes that dialogue "plays a crucial role in helping to create and populate credible fictional worlds," but she shifts the central theoretical question from "*how* the effect of the real may be created" to why readers read fictional dialogue as dialogue (*Fictional Dialogue*, 15, 34). Thomas's study, focused on the twentieth- and twenty-first-century novel, touches on some larger questions raised by this work; the section titled "Forms and Conventions: A Critical History of Approaches to Dialogue" (19–29) gives an overview of linguistic and literary research on dialogue.

3. Peter Brooks (*The Melodramatic Imagination*) argues that Henry James and Dickens share a melodramatic idea of gesture as capable of suggesting ineffable concepts within the novel. Edwin M. Eigner (*The Dickens Pantomime)* connects Dickens's characters with the types of pantomime; Valerie Purton (*Dickens and the Sentimental Tradition*) connects expressivity in Dickens with the sentimental tradition. Elaine Hadley argues, with respect to *Oliver Twist* and the New Poor Law, for an understanding of the political potential offered by melodrama in its collective and expressive elements (*Melodramatic Tactics*, 118). Most important to my argument is Juliet John's contention that Dickens's novels work according to a politically committed and self-consciously populist "aesthetic of ostension," which privileges a community of shared values and emotions rather than a romantic idea of interiority as conceived of in aesthetic terms as the private, intellectualized experience of art (*Dickens's Villains*, 16). Let me note here that Juliet John's adaptation of the concept of ostension carries within it the weaker sense of "ostensible" as it is often used: that which is only apparently the case.

4. In another critical-philosophical vein in "On Grace and Dignity," Friedrich Schiller makes an analogous observation in a discussion of human will in relation to beauty: "We can infer from the words of a man the kind of character he desires to have attributed to him; but if we desire to know what is in reality his character we must seek to divine it in the mimic expression which accompanies his words, and in his gestures, that is to say, in the movements which he did not desire" (188). My thanks to Casie LeGette for calling my attention to this passage. In her recuperation of "the positive values of critique, transparency, and civic virtue" that are, in Trilling "inescapably tied to the negative values of social conformity and disciplinarity," Amanda Anderson points out that authenticity is actually, in Trilling, "generated out of the opposing terms of sincerity

and insincerity," rather than being a "simple rejection or eclipsing or replacement" (*The Way We Argue Now*, 167, 166).

5. "If Ralph had not known and felt his power in wounding those he hated, his glances at Nicholas would have shown it him, in all its force, as he proceeded in the above address. Innocent as the young man was of all wrong, every artful insinuation stung, every well-considered sarcasm cut him to the quick, and when Ralph noted his pale face and quivering lip, he hugged himself to mark how well he had chosen the taunts best calculated to strike deep into a young and ardent spirit" (*Nicholas Nickleby*, 326). Here, Ralph rejoices in the perfect legibility of Nicholas.

6. Alexander Welsh observes that John Jarndyce is "unusual for Dickens in that he is a character not easy to read," an effect "technically . . . gained by representing him as deeply thoughtful but not describing those thoughts directly" (*Dickens Redressed*, 83).

7. In describing Dickens's distinct representation of character, Rosenberg asks, "How often, in life, do we apprehend with Jamesian certainty or Joycean specificity the consciousness of another? More often than not, even those people we know best retain a powerful aura of mystery—an aura shared by the best of Dickens's characters" (*Little Dorrit's Shadows*, 25). He later observes that "while it may be true that Tattycoram's personality seems nowhere near as complex as my own, it is equally true that my perception of, say, Isabel Archer in no way resembles my perception of the personality of anyone I know. The two are attempts to represent character from different, almost opposed perspectives, and the mistake . . . lies in applying the same set of criteria to both" (112).

8. Hori's comparative corpus includes thirteen novels written from 1830 to 1870 by authors other than Dickens (*Investigating Dickens' Style*, 27–28).

9. This evidence was originally drawn from a search of the novels from *Pickwick* to *Drood* (plus *A Christmas Carol*) in the Chadwyck-Healey database through an interface created by Matt Jockers for the BeyondSearch Workshop. It is now possible to use not only Hori's book but the CLiC Dickens project, an online resource I discuss in the body of the text (see clic.bham.ac.uk).

10. The term opposed to Bodenheimer's "knowingness" is not ignorance but innocence; an obsession with being taken in (*Knowing Dickens*, 29). Bodenheimer identifies a recurrent narrative in Dickens's letters and fiction "that trust or belief will be rewarded with indifference or betrayal"; I am interested in the strategies Dickens uses to depict trust as a problem (29).

11. Mitchell takes up Dickens at the narrator's reflection in *A Tale of Two Cities* that "every human creature is constituted to be that profound and secret mystery to one another" (qtd. 29). Mitchell points out that the reader often knows things the characters don't rather than dwelling on how much remains opaque even to the especially shrewd (or knowing) Dickensian narrator.

12. For Greiner, interiority, as signaled by repressed feelings, does not only provoke such "sympathetic translation" of "moral innocents" but, as in her first major example, of bad guys like Rogue Riderhood (*Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, 109, 95).

13. For the sake of contrast, consider the "meaning smile" in *Middlemarch,* from the man who helps Fred Vincy lose money through buying a bad horse: "a subdued unchangeable sceptical smile, of all expressions the most tyrannous over a susceptible mind, and, when accompanied by adequate silence, likely to create the reputation of an invincible understanding" (236). The precise consequences of this smile on a certain kind of observer are laid out in so many words.

14. Consider again Miss Squeers, who speaks not only "screwing up her lips" but "screwing up her lips, and looking as if nothing in earth, air, fire, or water, could afford her the slightest gleam of satisfaction." The effect of legible character is produced both by a textual appeal to theatrical, expressive gesture and by discursive irony.

15. Hack argues that Frederick Douglass "enlists" Dickens in the abolitionist cause by reprinting *Bleak House* in the *Frederick Douglass Paper*, realigning its focus on domestic problems with the American problem of slavery in a kind of "strategic anti-essentialism," and that Hannah Crafts "does not merely defy or hijack [Dickens's] localism" in her narrative reworking of the novel "but

rather breaks down its defining opposition between attention to people of color and attention to family and friends" (*Reaping Something New*, 32, 38).

16. See respectively John Kucich, *Excess and Restraint in the Novels of Charles Dickens*, Norman Page, *Speech in the English Novel*, Raymond Chapman *Forms of Speech in Victorian Fiction*, and Robert Golding, *Idiolects in Dickens*. See also Mahlberg's discussion in *Corpus Stylistics and Dickens's Fiction* of word "clusters" that characterize character speech and George Goodin's *Dickens's Dialogue*, which considers the exchange of dialogue between characters through linguistic accounts of the give-and-take of conversation.

17. Lambert's work was done by hand. His survey considers both earlier nineteenth-century novels, which consists of three to five samplings from *Waverley* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Frankenstein* (1818), *Vanity Fair* (1848), *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *Mary Barton* (1848), *Sybil* (1845), *Yeast* (1851), *Windsor Castle* (1842), and *Handley Cross* (1839), and mid-Victorian novels (*The Virginians* (1858), *Adam Bede* (1859), *Woman in White* (1860), *Can You Forgive Her?* (1864), and *Alice in Wonderland* (1866), though the latter are too few for an average to carry much weight. *Adam Bede* has 25 suspended quotations, while *The Virginians* averages 19.2 (*Vanity Fair* has only 19.4, on par with late Dickens) (*Dickens and the Suspended Quotation*, 133–34).

18. Lambert cites this marvelous passage in *Dickens and the Suspended Quotation,* 59, and in the *Oxford Handbook* ("Three Matters of Style," 696). It is worth noting that the suspensions take on a life of their own when, on the following page of *Chuzzlewit*, Pecksniff continues his inquiry after the elder Martin thus: " 'Who is with him now,' ruminated Mr Pecksniff, warming his back (as he had warmed his hands) as if it were a widow's back or an orphan's back, or an enemy's back, or a back that any less excellent man would have suffered to be cold: 'Oh dear me, dear me!' " (44). In a corpus approach to Dickens's style, Michaela Mahlberg considers a set of "as-if" word "clusters," which she reads as a pattern of asking a reader to interpret body language by analogy. Dickens's reliance on body parts and body language encounters metaphor here: like poetry, some speech tags are strikingly concrete and abstract. "As if" signals, for Mahlberg, a move away from the body and into a world of images or abstractions (see *Corpus Stylistics and Dickens's Fiction*, ch. 7).

19. Lambert speculates that suspended quotations drop off when the public readings begin: "Dickens learned to satisfy his need for contact through bouts of physical confrontation with his audience and thus had less need for such in direct contact as the heavy use of tags in his writings for publication" (*Dickens and the Suspended Quotation*, 140). In Lambert's study, the only novel on par with Dickens's novels in its use of suspended quotations is Robert Smith Surtees's *Handley Cross*. *Handley Cross* is the set of sketches that followed *Jorrocks's Jaunts and Jollities*, the series of sporting sketches (featuring a "cockney" sportsman) that prompted the *Pickwick* experiment. Lambert suggests that "Surtees is interested in the way people speak only when they speak in an amusing or grotesque way"; "one does not feel with Surtees, as one does with Dickens, that the common denominator of the suspensions must be sought below the level of local, immediate effect" (43). Yet Surtees's use of the suspended quotation also suggests that the development of this style of dialogue has its roots in the serial form more generally as relatively free-standing scenes. Kathryn Chittick argues that an important reason the *Pickwick Papers* were so very widely read is that it (like *Nicholas Nickleby*) was reprinted everywhere in extract or "detachable 'bits" (*Dickens and the 1830s*, 120).

20. In another project for the Stanford Literary Lab (on style at the scale of the sentence), a comparison of narrative and dialogue sentences in these novels yielded a giant body of "mixed sentences," which included speech tags and dialogue.

21. In linguistic terms, a speech tag or reporting clause accompanies directly reported speech or thought; it may specify not only the speaker (or thinker) but also the auditor, type of speech act, and manner of speaking (Biber et al., *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, 923).

Such clauses can be expanded to include detail about any aspect of the circumstances surrounding the speech, and this expansive potential becomes a central feature of Dickensian dialogue. We know more about the present use of speech tags than the historical use of speech tags: according to the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*'s study of a twentieth-century corpus, about 35 percent of reporting clauses contain only a subject and verb and occur in the final position. The most common form of expansion is to the right of the quoted speech, which accounts for 30 percent of cases (923). Expanded reporting clauses occur in the middle of the reported speech in only 5 percent of cases. In their 2004 study of late-twentieth century fiction Semino and Short find that "it is rare for the reporting clause to occur in initial position, probably due to the fact that this reduces the effect of drama and immediacy usually associated with [direct speech]" (*Corpus Stylistics*, 92). Helmut Bonheim and Gordon Collier have studied speech tag placement in a selection of canonical texts (sixteen texts drawn from between 1485 and 1975 in the case of Bonheim and seven texts drawn from between 1904 and 1966 in the case of Collier) and provide a set of individual cases to read against the larger pattern; see *The Narrative Modes* and "Style at the Interface: Speech-Tags," respectively.

22. Moseley analyzed placement by year using a generalized linear mixed model with multinomial distribution and logit link. The model included placement (beginning, middle, or end) as outcome, year of publication as fixed effect, and author as random effect. This study has evidentiary roots in Literary Lab pamphlet 5. For that project, Ryan Heuser divided the novels we were working on into narrative and dialogue "systems"; he later sent Moseley the sentences that combined speech tags and dialogue. We analyzed a random sample of 465 mixed sentences that had been hand-checked for tagging errors. Since some dialogue and narrative sentences were misclassified as "mixed," it is possible that some mixed sentences were misclassified as dialogue or narrative and therefore were excluded from this analysis. This could bias our results if the three placement categories were not proportionally represented in the misclassification. However, we do not believe that this would invalidate our main finding that placement changed over time.

23. Figure 3 shows the observed proportion of each sentence type by decade and the corresponding multinomial confidence intervals. A note for those unfamiliar with interpreting confidence intervals: confidence intervals convey uncertainty about the placement of the dot given the sample size and are represented in figure 3 as vertical lines stemming off from each dot. We can thus feel less confident about the sudden spike in "beginning" speech tags at the end of the century, when the confidence intervals overlap and, conversely, more confident about the higher proportion of the "middle" placements in the 1810s and 1820s than the "end" or "beginning" placements, as the black confidence intervals do not overlap with the other two.

24. In his account of "protagonicity," Fredric Jameson offers an alternative to markedly external perspective on minor characters to the "language of protagonists," whose "inner life must not be marked or personalized; they must not be allowed to become other to us or to be visible from the outside. It is our old friend the impersonal consciousness, the eternal present of an anonymous and purely formal awareness without content, that is required for them" (*The Antinomies of Realism*, 99). According to Jameson's formulation, the Dickensian protagonist is (like the character in Galdós's fiction who embodies a *waning* of protagonicity at the end of the century) "a minor character who has unaccountably been allowed to become the center of a novel in her own right" (99).

25. The manner adverbs are "freely," "timidly," and "lightly"—Hori does not count the use of "delicately" because it is not part of a directly reported speech clause.

26. Recall Esther's response to Mr. Bucket, who indicates that he knows Skimpole by observing that Skimpole has " 'No idea of money. . . . He takes it though!' ":" I involuntarily returned for answer, that I perceived Mr. Bucket knew him" (*Bleak House*, 874).

CONCLUSION: A Grammar of Perception

1. For other work on Andrew H. Miller's line of thinking, see also Sussman, "Optative Form in Anthony Trollope's The Small House at Allington," Buzard, "Item of Mortality;" and Rosenthal, *Good Form*.

2. In her "Aesthetics and the New Ethics," Hale opposes Butler's use of "as it were" ("an avowal of social positionality") to Nussbaum's elision of the phrase "as if for life" in her discussion of David Copperfield's "reading [as if] for life" (902, 898–99).

3. As the title, *They Say/I Say*, suggests, the book offers templates to help students position their ideas in relation to other people's arguments.

4. "Novel theory after the 1880s largely eliminate[s] novel reading from its conceptual apparatus" (Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel*, 7).

5. For a fuller account of Dames's thinking about Victorian reading practices through critical protocol, and my exploration of the larger question about the interrelation between nineteenth-century novel criticism and the form of the novel, see chapter 2.

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